RAINY WEEK

Eleanor Hallowell Abbott

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BY

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RAINY WEEK

CHAPTER I

IN the changes and chances of our New England climate it is not so much what a Guest can endure outdoors as what he can originate indoors that endears him most to a weather-worried Host.

Take Rollins, for instance, a small man, dour, insignificant—a prude in the moonlight, a duffer at sailing, a fool at tennis—yet once given a rain-patter and a smoky fireplace, of an audacity so impertinent, so altogether absurd, that even yawns must of necessity turn to laughter—or curses. The historic thunderstorm question, for instance, which he sprang at the old Bishop's house-party after five sweltering days of sunshine and ecclesiastical argument: "Who was the last person you kissed before you were married?"

A question innocent as milk if only swal-

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lowed! But unswallowed? Gurgled? Spat like venom from Bishop to Bishop? And from Bishop's Wife to Bishop's Wife? Oh la! Yet that Rollins himself was the only unmarried person present on that momentous occasion shows not at all, I still contend, the slightest "natural mendacity" of the man, but merely the perfectly normal curiosity of a confirmed Anchoret to learn what truths he may from those who have been fortunate—or unfortunate enough to live.

Certainly neither my Husband nor myself would ever dream of running a house-party without Rollins!

Yet equally certain it is not at all on Rollins's account but distinctly on our own that we invariably set the date for our annual house-party in the second week of May.

For twenty years, in the particular corner of the New England sea-coast which my husband and I happen to inhabit, it has never, with one single exception only, failed to rain from morning till night and night till morning again through the second week of May!

With all weather-uncertainties thus settled perfectly definitely, even for the worst, it is a comparatively easy matter for any Host

and Hostess to *Stage* such events as remain.

It is with purely confessional intent that I emphasize that word "stage." Every human being acknowledges, if honest, some one supreme passion of existence. My Husband's and mine is for what Highbrows call "the experimental drama."

We call it "Amateur Theatricals."

Yet even this innocent passion has not proved a serene one!

After inestimable seasons of devotion to that most ruthless of all goddesses, the Goddess of Amateur Theatricals, involving, as it does, wrangles with

Guests who refuse to accept unless they are assured that there will be a Play.

wrangles with

Guests who refuse to accept unless assured that there will not be a Play.

wrangles with

Guests already arrived, unpacked, tubbed, seated at dinner, who discover suddenly that their lines are too long.

wrangles with

Guests already arrived, unpacked, tubbed, seated at dinner, who discover equally suddenly that their lines are too short.

wrangles with

Guests who "can't possibly play in blue."

wrangles with

Guests who "can't possibly play in pink."

wrangles with

Guests who insist upon kissing in every act.

wrangles with

Guests who refuse to kiss in any act, it was my Husband's ingenious idea to organize instead an annual Play that should never dream it was a Play, acted by actors who never even remotely suspected that they were acting, evolving a plot that no one but the Almighty, Himself, could possibly foreordain.

We call this Play *"Rainy Week."*

Yet, do not, I implore you, imagine for a moment that by any such simple little trick as shifting all blame to the weather, all praise to the Almighty, *Care* has been eliminated from the enterprise.

It is only indeed at the instigation of this trick that the real hazard begins. For a Play after all is only a Play, be it humorous, amorous, murderous, adulterous, — a soap-bubble world combusting spontaneously of its own effervescence. But life is life and starkly real if not essentially earnest. And the merest

flicker of the merest eyelid in one of life's real emotions has short-circuited long ere this with the eternities themselves! It's just this chance of "short-circuiting with the eternities" that shifts the pucker from a Host's brow to his spine!

No lazy, purring, reunion of old friends this *Rainy Week* of ours, you understand? No dully congenial convocation of in-bred relatives? No conference on literature,—music,—painting? No symposium of embroidery stitches? Nor of billiard shots? But the deliberate and relentlessly-planned assemblage of such distinctly diverse types of men and women as prodded by unusual conditions of weather, domicile, and propinquity, will best act and re-act upon each other in terms inevitably dramatic, though most naïvely unrehearsed!

"Vengeance is mine!" said the Lord. "Very considerable psychologic, as well as dramatic satisfaction is now at last ours!" confess your humble servants.

In this very sincere if somewhat whimsical dramatic adventure of *Rainy Week,* the exigencies of our household demand that the number of actors shall be limited to eight.

Barring the single exception of Husband

and Wife no two people are invited who have ever seen each other before. Destiny plays very much more interesting tricks we have noticed with perfect strangers than she does with perfect friends!

Barring nothing no one is ever warned that the week will be rainy. It is astonishing how a guest's personality strips itself right down to the bare sincerities when he is forced unexpectedly to doff his extra-selected, super-fitting, ultra-becoming visiting clothes for a frankly nondescript costume chosen only for its becomingness to a — situation! In this connection, however, it is only fair to ourselves to attest that following the usual managerial custom of furnishing from its own pocket such costumes as may not for bizarre or historical reasons be readily reconverted by a cast to street and church wear, we invariably provide the *Rainy Week* costumes for our cast. This costume consists of one yellow oil-skin suit or "slicker," one yellow oil-skin hat, one pair of rubber boots. One dark blue jersey. And very warm woolen stockings.

Reverting also to dramatic sincerity no professional manager certainly ever chose his

cast more conscientiously than does my purely whimsical Husband!

After several years of experiment and readjustment the ultimate cast of *Rainy Week* is fixed as follows:

A Bride and Groom
One Very Celibate Person
Someone With a Past
Someone With a Future
A Singing Voice
A May Girl
And a Bore. (Rollins, of course, figuring as the Bore.)

Always there must be that Bride and Groom (for the Celibate Person to wonder about). And the Very Celibate Person (for the Bride and Groom to wonder about). Male or Female, one Brave Soul who had Rebuilt Ruin. Male or Female, one Intrepid Brain that Dares to Boast of Having Made Tryst with the Future. Soprano, Alto, Bass or Tenor, one Singing Voice that can Rip the Basting Threads out of Serenity. One Young Girl so May-Blossomy fresh and new that Everybody Instinctively Changes the Subject When She Comes into the Room. . . . And Rollins!

To be indeed absolutely explicit experience

has proved, with an almost chemical accuracy, that, quite regardless of "age, sex, or previous condition of servitude," this particular combination of

Romantic Passion
Psychic Austerity
Tragedy
Ambition
Poignancy
Innocence
And Irritation

cannot be housed together for even one Rainy Week without producing drama!

But whether that drama be farce or fury—? Whether he who came to *star* remains to *supe?* Who yet shall prove the hero? And who the villain? Who—? Oh, la! It's God's business now!

"All the more reason," affirms my Husband, "why all such details as light and color effects, eatments, drinkments and guest-room reading matter should be attended to with extra conscientiousness."

Already through a somewhat sensational motor collision in the gay October Berkshires we had acquired the tentative Bride and

Groom, Paul Brenswick and Victoria Meredith, as ardent and unreasonable a pair of young lovers as ever rose unscathed from a shivered racing car to face, instead of annihilation, a mere casual separation of months until such May-time as Paul himself, returning from Heaven knows what errand in China, should mate with her and meet with us.

And to New York City, of course, one would turn instinctively for the Someone With a Future. At a single round of studio parties in the brief Thanksgiving Holiday we found Claude Kennilworth. Not a moment's dissension occurred between us concerning his absolute fitness for the part. He was beautiful to look at, and not too young, twenty-five perhaps, the approximate age of our tentative Bride and Groom. And he made things with his hands in dough, clay, plaster, anything he could reach very insolently, all the time you were talking to him, modeling the thing he was thinking about, instead!

"Oh, just wait till you see him in bronze?" thrilled all the young Satellites around him.

"Till you see me in bronze!" thrilled young Kennilworth himself.

Never in all my life have I beheld anyone

as beautiful as Claude Kennilworth—with a bit of brag in him! That head sharply uplifted, the pony-like forelock swished like smoke across his flaming eyes, the sudden wild pulse of his throat. Heavens! What a boy!

"You artist-fellows are forever reproducing solids with liquids," remarked my Husband quite casually. "All the effects I mean! All the illusion! Crag or cathedral out of a dime-sized mud-puddle in your water-color box! Flesh you could kiss from a splash of turpentine! But can you reproduce liquids with solids? Could you put the ocean into bronze, I mean?"

"The ocean?" screamed the Satellites.

"No mere skinny bas-relief," mused my Husband, "of the front of a wave hitched to the front of a wharf or the front of a beach but waves corporeally complete and all alone —shoreless—skyless—like the model of a village—an ocean rolling all alone as it were in the bulk of its three dimensions?"

"In — bronze?" questions young Kennilworth. *"Bronze?"* His voice was very faintly raspish.

"Oh, it wasn't a blue ocean especially that

I was thinking about," confided my Husband, genially, through the mist of his cigarette. "Any chance pick-up acquaintance has seen the ocean when it's blue. But my wife and I, you understand, we live with the ocean! Call it by its first name,—'Oh Ocean!'—and all that sort of thing!" he smiled out abruptly above the sudden sharp spurt of a freshly-struck match. "The—the ocean I was thinking of," he resumed with an almost exaggerated monotone, "was a brown ocean—brown as boiled sea-weeds—mad as mud under a leaden sky — seething — souring — perfectly lustreless—every brown billow-top pinched-up as though by some malevolent hand into a vivid verdigris bruise——"

"But however in the world would one know where to begin?" giggled the Satellites. "Or how to break it off so it wouldn't end like the edge of a tin roof? Even if you started all right with a nice molten wave? What about the—last wave? The problem of the horizon sense? Yes! What about the horizon sense?" shouted everybody at once.

From the shadowy sofa-pillowed corner just behind the supper table, young Kennilworth's face glowed suddenly into view. But a minute

before I could have sworn that a girl's cheek lay against his. Yet now as he jumped to his feet the feminine glove that dropped from his fidgety fingers was twisted with extraordinary maliciousness, I noted, into a doll-sized caricature of a "Vamp.'

"I could put the ocean into bronze, Mr. Delville," he said, "if anybody would give me a chance!"

Perhaps it was just this very ease and excitement of having booked anyone as perfect as young Kennilworth for the part of Someone with a Future that made me act as impulsively as I did regarding Ann Woltor.

We were sitting in our room in a Washington hotel before a very smoky fireplace one rather cross night in late January when I confided the information to my Husband.

"Oh, by the way, Jack," I said quite abruptly, "I've invited Ann Woltor for Rainy Week."

"Invited whom?" questioned my Husband above the rim of his newspaper.

"Ann Woltor," I repeated.

"Ann—what?" persisted my Husband.

"Ann Woltor," I re-emphasized.

"Who's she?" quickened my Husband's interest very faintly.

"Oh, she's a woman," I explained—"or a girl—that I've been meeting 'most every day this last month at my hair-dresser's. She runs the accounts there or something and tries to keep everybody pacified. And reads the darndest books, all highbrow stuff. You'd hardly expect it! Oh, not modern highbrow, I mean, essays as bawdy as novels, but the old, serene highbrow,—Emerson and Pater and Wordsworth,—books that smell of soap and lavender, as well as brains. Reads 'em as though she liked 'em, I mean! Comes from New Zealand I've been told. Really, she's rather remarkable!"

"Must be!" said my Husband. "To come all the way from New Zealand to land in your hair-dresser's library!"

"It isn't my hair-dresser's library!" I corrected with faint asperity. "It's her own library! She brings the books herself to the office.

"And just what part," drawled my Husband, "is this New Zealand paragon, Miss Stoltor, to play in our Rainy Week?"

"Woltor," I corrected quite definitely. "Ann Woltor."

"Wardrobe mistress?" teased my Husband. "Or—?"

"She is going to play the part of the Someone With a Past," I said.

"What?" cried my Husband. His face was frankly shocked. "*What?*" he repeated blankly. "The most delicate part of the cast? The most difficult? The most hazardous? It seemed best to you, without consultation, without argument, to act so suddenly in the matter, and so—so all alone?"

"I had to act very suddenly," I admitted. "If I hadn't spoken just exactly the minute I did she would have been off to Alaska within another forty-eight hours."

"U—m—m," mused my Husband, and resumed his reading. But the half-inch of eyebrow that puckered above the edge of his newspaper loomed definitely as the sample of a face that was still distinctly shocked.

When he spoke again I was quite ready for his question.

"How do you know that this Ann Woltor has got a past?" he demanded.

"How do we know young Kennilworth's got a future?" I counter-checked.

"Because he makes so much noise about it I suppose," admitted my Husband.

"By which very same method," I grinned, "I deduct the fact that Ann Woltor has got a past,—inasmuch as she doesn't make the very slightest sound whatsoever concerning it."

"You concede no personal reticence in the world?" quizzed my Husband.

"Yes, quite a good deal," I admitted. "But most of it I honestly believe is due to sore throat. A normal throat keeps itself pretty much lubricated I've noticed by talking about itself."

"Herself," corrected my Husband.

"Himself," I compromised.

"But this Ann Woltor has told you that she came from New Zealand," scored my Husband.

"Oh, no, she hasn't!" I contradicted. "It was the hair-dresser who suggested New Zealand. All Ann Woltor has ever told me was that she was going to Alaska! Anybody's willing to tell you where he's going! But the person who never tells you where he's been—! The person who never by word, deed

or act correlates to-day with yesterday! The Here with the There—! I've been home with her twice to her room! I've watched her unpack the Alaska trunk! Not a thing in it older than this winter! Not a shoe nor a hat nor a glove that confides anything! No scent of fir-balsam left over from a summer vacation! No photograph of sister or brother! Yet it's rather an interesting little room, too,—awfully small and shabby after the somewhat plushy splendor of the hair-dressing job—but three or four really erudite English Reviews on the table, a sprig of blue larkspur thrust rather negligently into a water glass, and a man's——"

"Blue larkspur in—January?" demanded my Husband. "How—how old is this—this Woltor person?"

"Oh—twenty-five, perhaps," I shrugged.

With a gesture of impatience my Husband threw down his paper and began to poke the fire.

"Oh, Pshaw!" he said, "is our whole dramatic endeavor going to be wrecked by the monotony of everybody being 'twenty-five'?"

"Well—call it 'thirty-five' if you'd rather," I conceded. "Or a hundred and five! Ann

Woltor wouldn't care! That's the remarkable thing about her face," I hastened with some fervor to explain. "There's no dating on it! This calamity that has happened to her,—whatever it is, has wrung her face perfectly dry of all contributive biography except the mere structural fact of at least reasonably conservative birth and breeding."

A little bit abruptly my Husband dropped the fire-tongs.

"You like this Ann Woltor, don't you?" he said.

"I like her tremendously," I acknowledged.

"Tremendously *as* a person and tremendously *for* the part!" I insisted.

"Tremendously *as* a person and tremendously *for* the part!" I insisted.

"Yet there's something about it that worries you?" quizzed my Husband not unamiably.

"There is," I said, "just one thing. She's got a broken tooth."

With a gesture of real irritation my Husband sank down in his chair again and snatched up the paper.

It was ten minutes before he spoke again.

"Is it a front tooth?" he questioned without lifting his eyes from the page.

"It is," I said.

When my Husband jumped up from his chair this time he showed no sign at all of ever intending to return to it. As he reached for his hat and coat and started for the door, he tried very hard to grin. But the effort was poor. This was no mere marital disagreement, but a real professional shock.

"I simply can't stand it," he grinned. "One's prepared, of course, for a tragedy queen to sport a broken heart—but when it comes to a broken tooth——!"

"Wait till you see her!" I said. There was nothing else to say. "Wait till you see her!"

Even with the door closed behind him he came back once more to tell me how he felt.

"Oh!" he shivered. "O—H!"

Truly if we hadn't gone out together the very next day and found George Keets I don't know what would have happened. Depression still hung very heavily over my Husband's heart.

"Here it is almost February," he brooded, "and even with what we've got, we're still

short the Celibate and the Singing Voice and the May Girl."

It was just then that we turned the street corner and met George Keets.

"Why—why the Celibate—of all persons!" we both gasped as in a single breath, and rushed upon him.

Now it may seem a little strange instead of this that we have never thought to feature poor Rollins as the Celibate. To "double" him as it were as Celibate and Bore. Conserving thereby one by no means inexpensive outfit of water-proof clothes, twenty-one meals, a week's wash, and Heaven knows how many rounds of Scotch at a time of imminent drought. But Rollins—though as far as anybody knows, a bachelor and eminently chaste—is by no means my idea of a Celibate. Oh, not Rollins! Not anybody with a mind like Rollins! For Rollins, poor dear, would marry every day in the week if anybody would have him. It's the "other people" who have kept Rollins virgin. But George Keets on the other hand is a good deal of a "fascinator" in spite of his austerity, perhaps indeed because of his austerity, tall, lean, good-looking, extravagantly severe,

thirty-eight years old, and a classmate of my Husband at college. Whether Life would ever succeed or not in breaking down his unaccountable intention never-to-mate, that intention,—physical, mental, moral, psychic, call it whatever you choose,—was stamped indelibly and for all time on the curiously incongruous granite-like finish of his originally delicate features. Life had at least done interesting historical things to George Keets's face.

"Oh, George!" cried my Husband, "I thought you were in Egypt digging mummies."

"I was," admitted George without any further palaver of greeting.

"When did you get back?" cried my Husband, "And what are you doing now?"

"And where are you going to be in May?" I interposed with perfectly uncontrollable interest.

"Why, I'm just off the boat, you know," brightened George. "A drink would be good, of course. But first I'd just like to run into the library for a minute to see if they've put in any new thrillers while I've been gone. There's a corking new book on Archælurus that ought to be due about now."

"On w-what?" I stammered.

"Oh, fossil cats, you know, and all that sort of thing," explained George chivalrously. "But, of course — you, Mrs. Delville," he hastened now to appease me, "would heaps rather hear about Paris fashions, I know. So if you-people really should want me in May I'll try my best, I promise you, to remember every latest wrinkle of lace, or feather. Only, of course," he explained with typical conscientiousness, "in the museums and the libraries one doesn't see just—of course—the——"

"On the contrary, Mr. Keats," I interrupted hectically, "there is no subject in the world that interests me more—at the moment —than Mummies. And by the second week in May that interest will have assumed proportions that——"

"S-sh!" admonished my Husband. "But really, George," he himself hastened to cut in, "if you could come to us the second week in May——"

"May?" considered George. "Second week? Why, certainly I will." And bolted for the library, while my Husband and I in a per-

fectly irresistible impulse drew aside on the curbing to watch him disappear.

Equally unexplainably three totally non-concerned women turned also to watch him.

"It's his shoulders," I ventured. "The amazing virility of his shoulders contrasted with the stinginess of his smile."

"Stinginess nothing!" snapped my Husband. "Devil take him!"

"He may—yet," I mused as we swung into step again.

So now we had nothing to worry about—or rather no uncertainty to worry about except the May Girl and the Singing Voice.

"The Singing Voice," my Husband argued, "might be picked up by good fortune at most any cabaret show or choral practise. Not any singing voice would do, of course. It must be distinctly poignant. But even poignancy may be found sometimes where you least expect it, — some reasonably mature, faintly disappointed sort of voice, usually, lilting with unquestionable loveliness, just this side of real professional success.

"But where in the world should we find a really ingenuous Ingénue?"

"They don't exist any more!" I asserted.

"Gone out of style like the Teddy Bear!—Old Ingénues you see, of course, sometimes, sweet and precious and limp—as old Teddy Bears. But a brand new Ingénue—? Don't you remember the awful search we had last year and even then——?"

"Maybe you're right," worried my Husband.

And then the horrid attack of neuralgia descended on poor Mr. Husband so suddenly, so acutely, that we didn't worry at all about anything else for days! And even when that worry was over, instead of starting off gaily together for the Carolinas as we had intended, to search through steam-heated corridors, and green velvet golfways, and jessamine scented lanes, for the May Girl, my poor Husband had to dally at home instead, in a very cold, slushy and disagreeable city, to be X-rayed, tooth-pulled, ear-stabbed, and everything but Bertilloned, while I, for certain business reason, went on ahead to meet the Spring.

But even at parting it was the dramatic anxiety that worried my Husband most.

"Now, don't you dare do a thing this time," he warned me, "until I come! Look

around all you want to! Get acquainted! Size things up! But if ever two people needed to work together in a matter it's in this question of choosing a May Girl!"

Whereupon in an impulse quite as amazing to himself as to me—he went ahead and chose the May Girl all by himself!

Before I had been in the Carolinas three days the telegram came.

> "Have found May Girl. Success beyond wildest dreams. Doubles with Singing Voice. Absolute miracle. Explanations."

Himself and the explanations arrived a week later. Himself, poor dear, was rather depleted. But the explanations were full enough to have pleased anybody.

He had been waiting, it seems, on the day of the discovery, an interminably long time in the doctor's office. All around him, in the dinginess and general irritability of such an occasion, loomed the bulky shapes of other patients who like himself had also been waiting interminable eons of time. Everybody was very cross. And it was snowing outside,—one of those dirty gray late-winter snows that don't seem really necessary.

And when *She* came! Just a girl's laugh at first from the street door! An impish prance of feet down the dark, unaccustomed hallway! A little trip on the threshold! And then personified — laughing — blushing, stumbling fairly headlong at last into the room — the most radiantly lovely young girl that you have ever had the grace to imagine, dangling exultantly from each frost-pinked hand a very large, wriggly, and exceedingly astonished rabbit.

"Oh, Uncle Charles!" she began, "s-ee what I've found! And in an ash-barrel, too! In—a—" She blinked the snow from her lashes, took a sudden startled glance round the room, another at the clock, and collapsed with confusion into the first chair that she could reach.

A very tall "little girl" she was, and very young, not a day more than eighteen surely. And even in the encompassing bulk of her big coon-skin coat with its broad arms hugging the brown rabbits to her breast she gave an impression of extraordinary slimness and delicacy, an impression accentuated perhaps by a slender silk-stockinged ankle, the frilly cuff of a white sleeve, and the aura of pale gold hair

that radiated in every direction from the brim of her coon-skin hat. For fully fifteen minutes my Husband said she sat huddled-up in all the sweet furry confusion of a young animal, till driven apparently by that very confusion to essay some distinctly normal-appearing, every-day gesture, she reached out impulsively to the reading table and picked up a book which some young man had just relinquished rather suddenly at a summons to the doctor's inner office. Relaxing ever so slightly into the depths of her chair with the bunnies' noses twinkling contentedly to the rhythm of her own breathing, she made a wonderful picture, line, color, spirit, everything of *Youth*. Reading, with that strange, extra, inexplainable touch of the sudden little pucker in the eyebrows, sheer intellectual perplexity was in that pucker!

But when the young man returned from the inner office he did not leave at once as every cross, irritable person in the room hoped that he would, but fidgeted around instead with hat and coat, stamped up and down crowding other people's feet, and elbowing other people's elbows. With a gaspy glance at his watch he turned suddenly on the

girl with the rabbits. "Excuse me," he floundered, "but I have to catch a train—*please* may I have my book?"

"Your book?" deprecated the Girl. Confusion anew overwhelmed her! "Your—book? Why, I beg your pardon! Why — why —" Pink as a rose she slammed the covers and glanced for the first time at the title. The title of the book was "What Every Young Husband Should Know." . . . With a sigh like the sigh of a breeze in the ferns the tension of the room relaxed! A very fat, cross-looking woman in black satin ripped audibly at a side seam. . . . A frail old gentleman who really had very few laughs left, wasted one of them in the smothering depths of his big black-bordered handkerchief. . . . The lame newsboy on the stool by the door emitted a single snort of joy. Then the doctor himself loomed suddenly from the inner office, and started right through everybody to the girl with the rabbits. "Why, May," he laughed, "I told you not to get here till four o'clock!"

"Oh, not 'May'?" I protested to my Husband. "It simply couldn't be! Not *really?*"

"Yes, really," affirmed my Husband. "Isn't it the limit? But wait till you hear the rest!

She's Dr. Brawne's ward, it seems, and has been visiting him for the winter. . . . Comes from some little place way off somewheres. . . . And she's got one of those sweet, clear, absolutely harrowing 'boy soprano' types of voices that sound like incense and altar lights even in rag-time. But weirder than anything—" triumphed my Husband.

"Oh, not than 'anything'?" I gasped.

"But weirder than anything," persisted my Husband, "is the curious way she's marked."

"M-marked?" I stammered.

"Yes. After I saw her with her hat off," said my Husband, "I saw the 'mark.' I've seen it in boys before, but never in a girl—an absolutely isolated streak of gray hair! In all that riot of blondness and sparkle and youth, just as riotous, just as lovely, a streak of gray hair! It's bewitching! Bewildering! Like May itself! Now sunshine! Now cloud! You'll write to her immediately, won't you?" he begged. "And to Dr. Brawne, too? I told Dr. Brawne quite frankly that it was going to be rather an experimental party, but that, of course, we'd take the best possible care of her. And he said he'd never seen an occasion yet when she wasn't perfectly capable

of taking care of herself. And that he'd be delighted to have her come—" laughed my Husband quite suddenly, "if we were sure that we didn't mind animals."

"Animals?" I questioned.

"Yes, dogs, cats, birds!" explained my Husband. "It isn't apt to be a large animal such as a horse or a cow, Dr. Brawne was kind enough to assure me. But he never knew her yet, he said, to arrive anywhere without a guinea pig, squirrel, broken-winged bat, lame dove, or half-choked mouse that she had acquired on the way! She's very tender-hearted. And younger than——"

Blankly for a moment my Husband and I sat staring into each other's eyes. Then, quite impulsively, I reached over and kissed him.

"Oh, Jack," I admitted, "it's too perfect! Truly it makes me feel nervous!—Suppose she should roll her hoop off the cliff or——"

"Or—blow out the gas?" chuckled my Husband.

So you see now our cast was all assembled.

Radiant, "runctious," impatient Paul Brenswick and Victoria Meredith for the Bride and Groom.

George Keets for the Very Celibate Person.

Ann Woltor for the Someone With a Past.

Claude Kennilworth for the Someone With a Future.

May Davies for the May Girl and the Singing Voice.

And Rollins for the Bore. About Rollins I must now confess that I have not been perfectly frank. We hire Rollins! How else could we control him? Even with a mushroom mind like his,—fruiting only in bad weather, one can't force him on one's guests morning, noon, *and* night! Very fortunately here, for such strategy as is necessary, my Husband concedes one further weakness than what I have previously designated as his passion for amateur theatricals and his tolerance of me. That weakness is sea shells—mollusca, you know, and that sort of thing. . . . From all over the world, smelling saltily of coral and palms, iceberg or arctic,—and only too often alas of their dead selves, these smooth-spikey-pink-blue-yellow-or-mottled shells arrive with maddening frequency. And Rollins is a born cataloguer! What easier thing in the world to say than, "Oh, by the way, Rollins, old man, here's an invoice that might interest you from a Florida Key

that I've just located. . . . How about the second week in May? Could you come then, do you think? I'm all tied up to be sure with a houseful of guests that week, but they won't bother you any. And, at least, you'll have your evenings for fun. Clothes? Haven't got 'em? Oh, Pshaw! Let me see. It rained last year, didn't it? . . . Well, I guess we can raise the same umbrella that we raised for you then! S'long!"

Everything settled then! Everything ready but the springtime and the scenery! . . . And God Himself at work on that!—Hist! What is it? The flash of a blue-bird?

A bell tinkles! A pulley-rope creaks! And the Curtain Rises!

May always comes so amazingly soon after February! So infinitely much sooner than anyone dares hope that it would! Peering into snow-smeared shop windows some rather particularly bleak morning you notice with a half-contemptuous sort of amusement a precocious display of ginghams and straw hats. And before you can turn round to tell anybody about it, tulips have happened!—And It's May!

More than seeming extravagantly early this

year, May dawned also with extravagant lavishness. Through every prismatic color of the world, sunshine sang to the senses!

"What shall we do," fretted my Husband, "if this perfection lasts?" The question indeed was a leading one!

The scenery for Rainy Week did not arrive until the afternoon of the eighth.

From his frowning survey of bright lawns, gleaming surf, radiant sky, I saw my Husband turn suddenly with a little gasping sigh that might have meant anything.

"What is it?" I cried.

"Look!" he said, "it's come."

Silently, shoulder to shoulder, we stood and watched the gigantic storm-bales roll into the sky—packed in fleece, corded with ropes of mist, gorgeous, portentous,—To-morrow's Rain! It is not many hosts and hostesses under like circumstances who turn to each other as we did with a single whoop of joy!

An hour later, hatless and coatless in the lovely warm May twilight, we stood by the larch tree waiting for our guests. We like to have them sup in town at their own discretion or indiscretion, that first night, and all arrive together reasonably sleek and sleepy,

and totally unacquainted, on the eight o'clock train. But the larch tree has always been our established point for meeting the *Rainy Week* people. Conceding cordially the truth of the American aphorism that while charity may perfectly legitimately begin at home, hospitality should begin at the railroad station! We personally have proved beyond all doubt that for our immediate interests at stake dramatic effect begins at the entrance to our driveway.

Yet it is always with mingled feelings of trepidation and anticipation that we first sense the blurry rumble of motor wheels on the highway. If the station bus were only blue or green! But palest oak! And shuttered like a roll-top desk! Spilling out strange personalities at you like other people's ideas brimming from pigeon-holes!

For some unfathomable reason of constraint this night, no one was talking when the bus arrived. Shy, stiff-spined, non-communicative, still questioning, perhaps. Who was who and what was what, these seven guests who by the return ride a week hence might even be mated, such things have happened, or once more not speaking to each other, this also has

happened, loomed now like so many dummies in the gloom.

"Why, Hello!" we cried, jumping to the rear step of the bus as it slowed slightly at the curb, and thrusting our faces as genially as possible into the dark, unresponsive doorway.

"Hello!" rallied someone—I think it was Rollins. Whoever it was he seemed to be having a terrible time trying to jerk his suitcase across other people's feet.

"Oh, is this where you live?" questioned George Keets's careful voice from the shadows. The faintest possible tinge of relief seemed to be in the question.

"Here?" brightened somebody else.

A window-fastener clicked, a shutter crashed, an aperture opened, and everybody all at once, scenting the sea, crowded to stare out where the gray dusk merging into gray rocks merged in turn with the gray rocks into a low rambling gray fieldstone house silhouetted with indescribable weirdness at the moment against that delicate, pale gold, French-drawing-room sort of sky cluttered so incongruously with the clump of dark clouds.

"The road—doesn't go any farther?" puz-

zled someone. "There's no other stopping place you mean—just a little bit farther along? This is the end,—the last house,—the——?"

High from a cliff-top somewhere a sea bird lifted a single eerie cry.

"Oh, how—how dramatic!" gasped somebody.

Reaching out to nudge my Husband's hand I collided instead with a dog's cold nose.

Following apparently the same impulse my Husband's hand met the dog's startling nose at almost the same instant.

Except for a second's loss of balance on the bus-step neither of us resented the incident. But it was my Husband who recovered his conversation as well as his balance first.

"Oh, you Miss Davies!" he called blithely into the bus. "What's your Pom's name? Nose-Gay? Skip-a-bout? Cross-Patch? What? —Lucky for you we knew your propensity for arriving with pets! The kennel's all ready and the cat sent away!"

In the nearest shadow of all it was almost as though one heard an *ego* bristle.

"I beg your pardon, but the Pomeranian is mine," affirmed Claude Kennilworth's un-

mistakable voice with what seemed like quite unnecessary hauteur.

"What the deuce is the matter with everybody?" whispered my Husband.

With a jerk and a bump the bus grazed a big boulder and landed us wheezily at our own front door.

As expeditiously as possible my Husband snatched up the lantern that gleamed from the doorstep and brandishing it on high, challenged the shadowy occupants of the bus to disembark and proclaim themselves.

Ann Woltor stepped down first. As vague as the shadows she merged from her black-garbed figure faded un-outlined into the shadow of the porch. For an instant only the uplifted lantern flashed across her strange stark face—and then went crashing down into a shiver of glass on the gravelly path at my Husband's feet. "Ann—Stoltor!" I heard him gasp. My Husband is not usually a fumbler either with hand or tongue. In the brightening flare of the flash-light that someone thrust into his hands his face showed frankly rattled. "Ann *Woltor!*" I prompted him hastily. For the infinitesimal fraction of a second our eyes met. I hope my smile was

as quick. "What *is* the matter with everybody?" I said.

With extravagant exuberance my Husband jumped to help the rest of our guests alight. "Hi, there, Everybody!" he greeted each new face in turn as it emerged somewhat humpshouldered and vague through the door of the bus into the flare of his lantern light.

Poor Rollins, of course, tumbled out.

Fastidiously, George Keets illustrated how a perfect exit from a bus should be made,—suitcase, hat-box, English ulster, everything a model of its kind. Even the constraint of his face, absolutely perfect.

With the Pomeranian clutched rather drastically under one arm, Claude Kennilworth followed Keets. All the time, of course, you knew that it was the Pomeranian who was growling, but from the frowning irritability of young Kennilworth's eyes one might almost have concluded that the boy was a ventriloquist and the Pom a puppet instead of a puppy. "Her name is 'Pet,'" he announced somewhat succinctly to my Husband. "And she sleeps in no—kennel!"

A trifle paler than I had expected, but inexpressively young, lovely, palpitant, and alto-

gether adorable, the May Girl sprang into my vision—and my arms. Her heart was beating like a wild bird's.

With the incredibility of their miracle still stamped almost embarrassingly on their faces, our Bride-and-Groom-of-a-Week completed the list. It wasn't just the material physical fact that Love was consummated, that gave them that look. But the spiritual amazement that Love was consummatable! No other "look" in life ever compasses it,—ever duplicates it!

It made my Husband quite perceptibly quicken the tempo of his jocosity.

"One — two — three — four — five — six —seven," he enumerated. "All good guests come straight from Heaven! One — two — three—four—five—six—Seven—" he repeated as though to be perfectly sure, "*seven?*— Why—Why, what the—?" he interrupted himself suddenly.

With frank bewilderment I saw him jump back to the rear step of the bus and flash his light into the farthest corner where the huddled form of an *eighth* person loomed weirdly from the shadows.

It was a man—a young man. And at first glimpse he was quite dead. But on second

glimpse, merely drunk. Hopelessly, — helplessly,—sodden drunk, with his hat gone, his collar torn away, his haggard face sagging like some broken thing against his breast.

With a tension suddenly relaxed, a faint sigh seemed to slip from the group outside. In the crowding faces that surrounded us instantly, it must have been something in young Kennilworth's expression, or in the Pomeranian's, that made my Husband speak just exactly as he did. With his arms held under the disheveled, uncouth figure, he turned quite abruptly and scanned the faces of his guests, "And whose little pet—may this be?" he asked trenchantly.

From the shadow of the Porte-cochère somebody laughed. It was rather a vacuous little laugh. Sheer nerves! Rollins, I think.

Framed in the half-shuttered window of the bus the May Girl's face pinked suddenly like a flare of apple blossoms.

"He—came with—me," said the May Girl.

No matter how informally one chooses to run his household there is almost always some one rule I've noticed on which the smoothness of that informality depends.

In our household that rule seems to be that

no explanations shall ever be asked either in the darkness or by artificial light. . . . It being the supposition I infer that most things explain themselves by daylight. . . . Perfectly cordially I concede that they usually do. . . . But some nights are a great deal longer to wait through than others.

It wasn't, on this particular night, that anyone refused to explain. But that nobody even had time to think of explaining. The young Stranger was in a bad way. Not delirium tremens nor anything like that, but a fearful alcoholic disorganization of some sort. The men were running up and down stairs half the night. Their voices rang through the halls in short, sharp orders to each other. No one else spoke above a whisper. With silly comforts like talcum powder, and hot water bottles, and sweet chocolate, and new novels, I put the women to bed. Their comments if not explanatory were at least reasonably characteristic.

From a swirl of pink chiffon and my best blankets, with her ear cocked quite frankly toward a step on the stairs, her eyes like stars, her mouth all a-kiss, the Bride reported her own emotions in the matter.

"No,—no one, of course had ever believed for a moment," the Bride assured me, "that the Drunken Man was one of the guests. . . . And yet, when he didn't get off at any of the stops, and this house was so definitely announced as the 'end of the road'—why it did, of course, make one feel just a little bit nervous," flushed the Bride, perfectly irrelevantly, as the creak on the stairs drew nearer.

Ann Woltor registered only a very typical indifference.

"A great many different kinds of things," she affirmed, "were bound to happen in any time as long as a day. . . . One simply had to get used to them, that was all." She was unpacking her sombre black traveling bag as she spoke, and the first thing she took out from it was a man's gay, green-plaided golf cap. It looked strange with the rest of her things. All the rest of her things were black.

I thought I would never succeed in putting the May Girl to bed. With a sweet sort of stubbornness she resisted every effort. The first time I went back she was kneeling at her bedside to say her "forgotten prayers." The second time I went back she had just jumped up to "write a letter to her Grandfather."

"Something about the sea," she affirmed, "had made her think of her grandfather." It was a long time," she acknowledged, since she "had thought of her grandfather." "He was very old," she argued, "and she didn't want to delay any longer about writing." Slim and frank as a boy in her half-adjusted blanket-wrapper dishabille she smiled up at me through the amazing mop of gold hair with the gray streak floating like a cloud across the sunshine of her face. She was very nervous. She *must* have been nervous. It darkened her eyes to two blue sapphires. It quickened her breath like the breath of a young fawn running. "And would I please tell her how to spell 'oceanic'?" she implored me. As though answering intuitively the unspoken question on my lips, she shrugged blame from her as some exotic songbird might have shrugged its first snow. "No—she didn't know who the young man was! Truly—as far as she knew —she had never—never seen the young man before!—o-c-e-a-n-i-c—was it?"

The rain was not actually delivered until one o'clock in the morning. Just before dawn I heard the storm-bales rip. In sheets of silver and points of steel, with rage and roar,

and a surf like a picture in a Sunday supplement, the weather broke loose!

Thank heaven the morning was so dark that no one appeared in the breakfast-room an instant before the appointed hour of nine.

George Keets, of course, appeared exactly at nine, very trim, very *distingué,* in a marvelously tailored gray flannel suit, and absolutely possessed to make his own coffee.

Claude Kennilworth's morning manner was very frankly peevish. "His room had a tin roof and he hardly thought he should be able to stand it. . . . Rain? Did you call this rain? It was a *Flood!* . . . Were there any Movie Palaces near? . . . And were they open mornings? . . . And he'd like an underdone chop, please, for the Pomeranian. . . . And it wasn't his dog anyway,—darn the little fool,—but belonged to the girl who had the studio next to his and she was possessed with the idea that a week at the shore would put the pup on its feet again. . . . Women were so blamed temperamental. . . . If there was one thing in the world that he hated it was temperamental people." And all the time he was talking he wasn't making anything with his hands, because he wasn't

thinking anything instead, "And how in Creation," he scolded, "did we ever happen to build a house out on the granite edge of Nowhere? . . . How did we stand it? How——? . . . Hi there! . . . Wait a moment! . . . *God*—what *Form!*—That wave with the tortured top! . . . Hush! . . . Don't speak! . . . *Please* leave him alone! Breakfast? Not yet! When a fellow could watch a—a thing like that! . . . For heaven's sake, pass him that frothy-edged napkin! . . . Did anybody mind if he *tore* it? . . . While he watched that other froth tear!"

Dear, honest, ardent, red-blooded Paul Brenswick came down so frankly interested in the special device by which our house gutters took care of such amazing torrents of water that everybody felt perfectly confident all at once that no bride of his would ever suffer from leaky roofs or any other mechanical defect. Paul Brenswick liked the rain just as much as he liked the gutters! And he liked the sea! And he liked the house! And he liked the sky! And he liked everything! Even when a clumsy waitress joggled coffee into his grapefruit he seemed to like that just as much as he liked everything else. Paul

Brenswick was a real Bridegroom. I am not, I believe, a particularly envious person, and have never as far as I know begrudged another woman her youth or her beauty or her talent or her wealth. But if it ever came to a chance of swapping facial expressions, just once in my life, some very rainy morning, I wish I could look like a Bridegroom!

But the expression on the Bride's face was distinctly worried. Joy worried! Any woman who had ever been a bride could have read the expression like an open book. Victoria Brenswick had not counted on rain. Moonlight, of course, was what she had counted on! Moonlight, day and night in all probability! And long, sweet, soft stretches of beach! And cavernous rocks! And incessantly mirthful escapades of escape from the crowd! But to be shut up all day long in a houseful of strange people! . . . With a Bridegroom who after all was still more or less of a strange Bridegroom? The panic in her face was almost ghastly! The panic of the Perfectly-Happy! The panic of the person hanging over-ecstatically on the absolute perfection of a singer's prolonged high note, driven all at once to wonder if this is the

moment when the note must break! . . . To be all alone and bored on a rainy day is no more than anyone would expect. . . . But to be with one's Lover and have the day prove dull? . . . If God in the terrible uncertainty of Him should force even one dull day into the miracle of their life together——?

Ann Woltor, dragging down to breakfast just a few moments late, had not noticed especially, it seemed, that the day was rainy. She met my Husband's eyes as she met the eyes of her fellow-guests, calmly, indifferently, and with perfect sophistication. If his presence or personality was in any way a shock to her she certainly gave no sign of it.

The May Girl didn't appear till very late, so late indeed that everybody started to tease her for being such a Sleepy Head. Her face was very flushed. Her hair in a riot of gold—and gray. Her appetite like the appetite of a young cannibal. Across the rim of her cocoa cup she hurled a lovely defiance at her traducers. "Sleepy Head?" she exulted. "Not much! Hadn't she been up since six? And out on the beach? And all over the rocks? . . . Way, way out to the farthest

point? . . . There was such a heavenly suit of yellow oil-skins in her closet! . . . She hoped it wasn't cheeky of her but she just couldn't resist 'em! . . . And the fishes? . . . The poor, poor little bruised fishes dashed up, by that terrible surf on the rocks! . . . . She thought she never, never would get them all put back! . . . They kept coming and coming so! Every new wave! Flopping!—Flopping——"

Rollins's breakfast had been sent to his room. You yourself wouldn't have wanted to spring Rollins on any one quite so early in the day. And with my best breakfast tray, my second best china, and sherry in the grapefruit, there was no reason certainly why Rollins in any way should feel discriminated against. Surely, as far as Rollins knew, every guest was breakfasting in bed.

Even without Rollins there was quite enough uncertainty in the air.

Everybody was talking—talking about the morning, I mean—not about yesterday morning; most certainly not about yesterday night! Babble, chatter, drawl, laughter, the voices rose and fell. Breakfast indeed was just

about over when a faint stir on the threshold made everybody look up.

It was the Drunken Stranger of the night before.

Heaven knows he was sober enough now. But very shaky! Yet collarless as he was and still unshaven — our men had evidently not expected quite so early a resuscitation—he loomed up now in the doorway with a certain tragic poise and dignity that was by no means unattractive.

"Why, hello!" said everybody.

"Hello!" said the Stranger. With a palpable flex of muscle he leaned back against the wainscoting of the door and narrowed his haggard eyes to the cheerful scene before him. "I don't know—where I am," he said, "or how I got here. . . . Or who you are." "I can't seem to remember anything." The faintly sheepish smile that quickened suddenly in his eyes, if not distinctly humorous, was at least plucky. "I think I must have had a drink," he said.

"I wouldn't wonder!" grinned Paul Brenswick.

"You are perfectly right," conceded George Keets.

"Have another!" suggested my Husband. "A straight and narrow this time! You look wobbly. There's nothing like coffee."

And still the Stranger stood undecided in the doorway. "I'm not very fit," he acknowledged. "Not with ladies. . . . But I *had* to know where I was." Blinking with perplexity he stared and stared at the faces before him. "I'm three thousand miles from home," he worried. "I don't know a soul this side of the Sierras. . . . I—I don't know how it happened——"

"Oh, Shucks!" shrugged young Kennilworth. "Easiest thing in the world to happen to a stranger in a new town! 'Welcome to our City'—'Welcome to our City' from night till morning and morning till night again! Any crowd once it gets started——"

"Crowd!" brightened the Stranger. "I—I was in some sort of a—a crowd?" he rummaged hopefully through his poor bruised brain.

From her concentrated interest in a fried chicken-bone, the May Girl glanced up with her first evidence of divided attention.

"Yes! You were!" she confided genially.

"It was at the railroad junction. And when the officer arrived, he said, 'I hate like the dickens to run this gentleman in, but if there's nobody to look after him—?' So I said you belonged to me! I saw the crape on your sleeve!" said the May Girl.

"Crape—on—my—sleeve?" stammered the Stranger. With a dreadful gesture of incredulity he lifted his black-banded arm into vision. It was like watching a live heart torn apart to see his memory waken. "My—God!" he gasped. "My *God!*" Still wavering but with a really heroic effort to square his stricken shoulders, he swung back toward the company. His face was livid,—his voice, barely articulate. Over face and voice lay still that dreadful blight of astonishment. But when he spoke his statement was starkly simple. "I—I buried my wife—and unborn child—yesterday," he said. "In a strange land—among strangers I—I——"

More quickly than I could possibly have imagined it, George Keets was on his feet beckoning the Stranger to the place which he himself had just vacated. And with his hands on the Stranger's shoulders he bent down

suddenly over him with a curiously twisted little smile.

"Welcome to our — Pity!" said George Keets.

Between Paul Brenswick and his Bride there flashed a sharp glance of terror. It was as though the bride's heart had gasped out. "What if I have to die some day?—And *this* day was wasted in rain?"

I saw young Kennilworth flush and turn away from that glance. I saw the May Girl open her eyes with a new baffled sort of perplexity.

It was then that Rollins came puttering in, grinning like a Chessy Cat, with his half-demolished breakfast sliding round rather threateningly on his ill-balanced tray. The strange exultancy of rain was in his eye.

"I thought I heard voices," he beamed. "Merry voices!" With mounting excitement he began to beat tunes with his knife and fork upon the delicate porcelain dome of his toast dish. "Am I a—King," he began to intone, "that I should call my own, this—?" Struck suddenly by the somewhat strained expression of Ann Woltor's face, he dropped

his knife and fork and fixed his eye upon her for the first time with an unmistakable intentness.

"How did you break your tooth?" beamed Rollins.

CHAPTER II

FOR a single horrid moment everybody's heart seemed to lurch off into space to land only too audibly in a gaspy thud of dismay.

Then Ann Woltor with unprecedented presence of mind jumped up from the table and ran to the mirror over the fireplace. Only the twittering throat-muscle reflected in that mirror belied for an instant the sincerity of either her haste or her astonishment.

"Broken tooth?" she protested incredulously. "Why! Have I got a—broken tooth?"

People acknowledge their mental panics so divergently. My Husband acknowledged his by ramming his elbow into his coffee cup. Claude Kennilworth lit one cigarette after another. The May Girl started to butter a picture post card that someone had just passed her. Quite starkly before my very eyes I saw the Sober Stranger, erstwhile drunken, reach out and slip a silver salt-shaker into his pocket. Meeting his glance

my own nerves exploded in a single hoot of mirth.

Into the unhappy havoc of the Stranger's face a rather sick but very determinate little smile shot suddenly.

"Well, I certainly am rattled?" he acknowledged.

His embarrassment was absolutely perfect. Not a whit too much, not a whit too little, at a moment when the slightest under-emphasis or over-emphasis of his awkwardness would have stamped him ineradicably as either boor —or bounder. More indeed by his chair's volition than by his own he seemed to jerk aside then and there from any further responsibility for the incident. Turbid as the storm at the window his eyes racked back to the eyes of his companions.

"Surely," he besought us, "there must be some place—some hotel—somewhere in this town—where I can crawl into for a day or two till I can yank myself together again? . . . Taking me in this way from the streets— or worse—the way you-people have—" Along the stricken pallor of his forehead a glisten of sweat showed faintly. From my eyes to my Husband's eyes, and back to mine again

he turned with a sharply impulsive gesture of appeal. "How do you-people know but what I *am* a burglar?" he demanded.

"Even so," I suggested blithely, "can't you see that we'd infinitely rather have you visiting here as our friend than boarding at the hotel as our foe?"

The mirthless smile on the Stranger's face twitched ever so faintly at one corner.

"You really believe then—" he quickened, "that there is 'honor among thieves'?"

"All proverbs," intercepted my Husband a bit abruptly, "are best proved by their antithesis. We do at least know—that there is at times—a considerable streak of dishonor among saints!"

"Eh?—What's that—I didn't quite catch it," beamed the Bridegroom.

But my Husband's entire attention seemed focused rather suddenly on the Stranger.

"So you'd much better stay right on here where you are!" he adjured him with some accent of authority. "Where all explanations are already given and taken! . . . Ourselves quite opportunely short one guest and long one guest-room, and— No! I won't listen for a moment to its being called an 'imposition'!"

protested my Husband. "Not for a moment! Only, of course, I must admit," he confided genially, above the flare of a fresh cigarette, "that it would be a slight convenience to know your name."

"My name?" flushed the Stranger. "Why, of course! It's Allan John."

"You mean 'John Allan,'" corrected the May Girl very softly.

"No," insisted the Stranger. "It's Allan John." Quite logically he began to rummage through his pockets for the proof. "It's written on my bill-folder," he frowned. "It's in my check-book. . . . It's written on no-end of envelopes." With his face the color of half-dead sedge grass he sank back suddenly into his chair and turned his empty hands limply outward as though his wrist-bones had been wrung. "Gone!" he gasped. "Stripped! —Everything!"

"There you have it!" I babbled hysterically. "Now, how do you know but what *we* are burglars? . . . This whole house a Den of Thieves? . . . The impeccable Mr. George Keets there at your right,—no more, no less, than exactly what he looks,—an almost perfect replica of a stage 'Raffles'?"

"Eh? What's that?" bridled George Keets.

"Dragging you here to this house the way we did," I floundered desperately. "Quite helpless as you were. So—so——"

"'Spifflicated,'" prompted the May Girl. The word on her lips was like the flutter of a rose petal.

With a little gasp of astonishment young Kennilworth rose from his place, and dragging his chair in one hand, his plate of fruit in the other, moved round to the May Girl's elbow to finish his breakfast. Like a palm trying to patronize a pine tree, his crisp exotic young ego swept down across her young serenity.

"Really, I don't quite make you out," he said. "I think I shall have to study you!"

"Study — me?" reflected the May Girl. "Make a lesson about me, you mean? On a holiday?" The vaguely dawning dimple in her smooth cheek faded suddenly out again.

The Stranger—Allan John—it seemed, was rising from the table.

"If you'll excuse me, I think I'll go to my room," he explained. "I'm still pretty shaky. I'm——"

But half way to the stairs, as though drawn

by some irresistible impulse, he turned, and fumbling his way back across the dining-room opened the big glass doors direct into the storm. Tripping ever so slightly on the threshold he lurched forward in a single wavering step. In an instant the May Girl was at his side, her steadying hand held out to his! Recovering his balance almost instantly he did not however release her hand, but still holding tight to it, indescribably puzzled, indescribably helpless, stood shoulder to shoulder with her, staring out into the tempestuous scene. Lashed by the wind the May Girl's mop of hair blew gold, blew gray, across his rain-drenched eyes. Blurred in a gusty flutter of white skirts his whole tragic, sagging figure loomed suddenly like some weird, symbolic shadow against the girl's bright beauty.

Frankly the picture startled me! "S-s-h!" warned my Husband. "It won't hurt her any! He doesn't even know whether she's young or old."

"Or a boy—or a girl," interposed George Keets, a bit drily.

"Or an imp or a saint," grinned young Kennilworth. "Or——"

"Or anything at all," persisted my Husband, "except that she says '*Kindness*'—and nothing else, you notice, except just '*Kindness.*' No suggestions, you observe? No advice? And at an acid moment in his life of such unprecedented shock and general nervous disorganization when his only conceivable chance of 'come-back' perhaps, hangs on the alkaline wag of a strange dog's tail or the tune of a street piano proving balm not blister. By to-morrow—I think—you won't see him holding hands with the May Girl—nor with any other woman. Personally," confided my Husband a bit abruptly, "I rather like the fellow! Even in the worst of his plight last night there was a certain fundamental sort of poise and dignity about him as of one who would say, 'Bad as this is, you chaps must see that I'd stand ready with my life to do the same for you'!"

"'To—do—the same—for you?'" gasped the Bride. Very quietly, like an offended young princess, she rose from the table and stood for that single protesting moment with her hand on her Bridegroom's shoulder. Her eager, academic young face was frankly aghast,—her voice distinctly strained. "I'm

sorry," she said, "but I quite fail to see how the word 'dignity' could possibly be applied to any man who had so debased himself as to go and get drunk because his wife and child were dead!"

"You talk," said my Husband, "as though you thought 'getting drunk' was some sort of jocular sport. It isn't! That is, not inevitably, you know!"

"No—I didn't—know," murmured the Bride coldly.

"Deplorable as the result proved to be," interposed George Keets's smooth, carefully modulated voice, "it's hardly probable I suppose that the poor devil started out with the one deliberate purpose of—of 'debasing' himself, as Mrs. Brenswick calls it."

"N-o?" questioned the Bride.

"It isn't exactly, you mean, as though he'd leapt from the church shouting, 'Yo—ho—, and a bottle of rum,' " observed young Kennilworth with one faintly-twisted eyebrow.

"S-s-h!" admonished everybody.

"Maybe he simply hadn't eaten for days," suggested my Husband.

"Or slept for nights and nights," frowned George Keets.

"And just absolutely was obliged to have a bracer," said my Husband, "to put the bones back into his knees again so that he could climb up the steps of his train and fumble some sort of way to his seat without seeming too conspicuous. Whatever religion may do, you know, to starch a man's soul or stiffen his upper lip, he's got to have bones in his knees if he's going to climb up into railroad trains. . . . And our poor young friend here, it would seem, merely mis——"

"Mis — calculated," mused Kennilworth, "how many knees he had."

"Paul wouldn't do it!" flared the Bride.

"Do what?" demanded young Kennilworth.

"Hush!" protested everybody.

"Make a beast of himself—if I died—if I died!" persisted the Bride.

"Pray excuse me for contradicting either your noun or your preposition," apologized my Husband. "But even at its worst I'm quite willing to wager that the only thing in the world poor Allan John started out to 'make' was an oblivion—for—himself."

"An oblivion?" scoffed the Bride.

"Yes—even for one night!" persisted my Husband. "Even for one short little night!

. . . Before the horror of 365 nights to the year and God knows how many years to the life—rang on again! Some men really like their wives you know, — some men — so no matter how thin-skinned and weak this desire for oblivion seems to you—" quickened my Husband, "it is at least a——"

"Paul wouldn't!" frowned the Bride.

In the sudden accentuation of strain everybody turned as quickly as possible to poor Paul to decide as cheerfully as seemed compatible with good taste just what that gorgeously wholesome looking specimen of young manhood would or would not do probably under suggested circumstances. Nobody certainly wanted to consider the matter seriously, yet nobody with the Bride's scared eyes still scorching through his senses would have felt quite justified I think in mere shrugging the issue aside.

"No, I don't think Paul—would!" rallied my Husband with commendable quickness. "Not with those eyes! Not with that particular shade of crisp, controlled hair! . . . Complexions like his aren't made in one generation of righteous nerves and digestions! . . . Oh no—! Even in the last ditch the worst

thing Paul would do would be to stalk round putting brand new gutters on a brand new house!"

"Bridge-building is my job—not gutters," grinned Paul unhappily.

"Stalk round building brand new bridges," corrected my Husband.

"Intoxicated with bridges!" triumphed young Kennilworth. "Doped with specifications!"

"But perhaps Allan John—doesn't know how to build bridges," murmured my Husband. "And perhaps in Allan John's family an occasional Maiden Aunt *or* Uncle has strayed just a——"

With the faintest possible gesture of impatience, but still smiling, the Bridegroom rose from the table and lifted his Bride's hand very gently from his shoulder.

"Who started this conversation, anyway?" he quizzed.

"I did!" laughed everybody.

"Well, I end it!" said the Bridegroom.

"Oh, thunder!" protested young Kennilworth. In the hollow of his hand something that once had been the spongy shapeless center of a breakfast roll crushed back into sponge

again. But in the instant of its crushing, crude as the modeling was, half jest, half child's play, I sensed the unmistakable parody of a woman's finger-prints bruising into the soft crest of a man's shoulder. Even in the absurdity of its substance the sincerity of the thing was appalling. Catching my eye alone, young Kennilworth gave an amused but distinctly worldly-wise little laugh.

"Women do care so much, don't they?" he shrugged.

A trifling commotion in the front hall stayed the retort on my lips.

The commotion was Ann Woltor. Coated and hatted and already half-gloved she loomed blackly from the shadows, trying very hard to attract my attention.

In my twinge of anxiety about the May Girl I had quite forgotten Ann Woltor. And in the somewhat heated discussion of Allan John's responsibilities and irresponsibilities, the May Girl also, it would seem, had passed entirely from my mind.

"I'm very sorry," explained Ann Woltor, "but with this unfortunate accident to my tooth I shall have to hurry, of course, right back to town." Even if you had never heard

Ann Woltor speak you could have presaged perfectly from her face just what her voice would be like, gravely contralto, curiously sonorous, absolutely without either accent or emphasis, yet carrying in some strange, inexplainable way a rather goose-fleshy sense of stubbornness and finality. "One can't exactly in a Christian land," droned Ann Woltor, "go round looking like the sole survivor of a massacre."

Across the somewhat sapient mutual consciousness that ever since we had first laid eyes on each other five months ago—and goodness knows how long before that—she had been going round perfectly serenely 'looking like the sole survivor of a massacre,' Ann Woltor and I stared just a bit deeply into each other's eyes. The expression in Ann's eyes was an expression of peculiar poignancy.

"No, of course not!" I conceded with some abruptness. "But surely if you can find the right dentist and he's clever at all, you ought to be able to get back here on the six-thirty train to-night?"

"The six-thirty train? Perhaps," murmured Ann Woltor. Once again her eyes hung upon mine. And I knew and Ann Woltor

knew and Ann Woltor knew that I knew,—that she hadn't the slightest intention in the world of returning to us on any train whatsoever. But for some reason known only to herself and perhaps one other, was only too glad to escape from our party—anatomically impossible as that escape sounds—through the loop-hole of a broken tooth. Already both black gloves were fastened, and her black traveling-bag swayed lightly in one slim, determinate hand. "Your maid has ordered the station bus for me," she confided; "and tells me that by changing cars at the Junction and again at Lees— Truly I'm sorry to make any trouble," she interrupted herself. "If there had been any possible way of just slipping out without anybody noticing——!"

"Without anybody noticing?" I cried. "Why, Ann, you dear silly!"

At this, my first use of her Christian name, she flashed back at me a single veiled glance of astonishment, and started for the door. But before I could reach her side my Husband stepped forward and blocked her exit by the seemingly casual accident of plunging both arms rather wildly into the sleeves of his great city-going raincoat.

"Why the thing is absurd!" he protested. "You can't possibly make train connections! And there isn't even a covered shed at the Junction! If this matter is so important I'll run you up to town myself in the little closed car!"

Across Ann Woltor's imperturbable face an expression that would have meant an in-growing scream on any other person's countenance flared up in a single twitching lip-muscle and was gone again. Behind the smiling banter in my Husband's eyes she also perhaps had noted a determination quite as stubborn as her own.

"Why—if you insist," she acquiesced, "but it has always distressed me more than I can say to inconvenience anybody."

"Inconvenience — nothing!" beamed my Husband. Ordinarily speaking my Husband would not be described I think as having a beaming expression.

With a chug like the chug of a motor-boat the little closed car came splashing laboriously round the driveway. Its glassy face was streaked with tears. Depressant as black life-preservers its two extra tires gleamed and dripped in their jetty enamel-cloth casings. A

jangle as of dungeon chains clanked heavily from each fresh revolution of its progress.

Everybody came rushing helpfully to assist in the embarkation.

My Husband's one remark to me flung back in a whisper from the steering wheel, though frankly confidential, concerned Allan John alone.

"Don't let Allan John want for anything to-day," he admonished me. "Keep his body and mind absolutely glutted with bland things like cocoa and reading aloud . . . And don't wait supper for us!"

With her gay jonquil-colored oil-skin coat swathing her sombre figure, Ann Woltor slipped into the seat beside him and slammed the door behind her. Her face was certainly a study.

"Sixty miles to town if it's an inch! How —cosy," mused young Kennilworth.

"Good-bye!" shouted everybody.

"Good-bye!" waved Ann Woltor and my Husband.

As for Rollins, he was almost beside himself with pride and triumph. Shuffling joyously from one foot to the other he crowded to the very edge of the vestibule and with his

small fussy face turned up ecstatically to the rain, fairly exploded into speech the instant the car was out of earshot.

"She'll look better!" gloated Rollins.

"Who?—the car?" deprecated young Kenilworth.

Then, because everybody laughed out at nothing, it gave me a very good chance suddenly to laugh out at "nothing" myself. And most certainly I had been needing that chance very badly for at least the last fifteen minutes. Because really when you once stopped to consider the whole thrilling scheme of this "Rainy Week" Play, and how you and your Husband for years and years had constituted yourself a very eager, earnest-minded Audience-of-Two to watch how the Lord Almighty, —the one unhampered Dramatist of the world, would work out the scenes and colors — the exits and entrances — the plots and counter-plots — of the material at hand — it was just a bit astonishing to have your Husband jump up from his place in the audience and leap to the stage to be one of the players instead!

It wasn't at all that the dereliction worried your head or troubled your heart. But it left your elbow so lonely! Who was there left

for your elbow to nudge? When the morning curtain rose on a flight of sea gulls slashing like white knives through a sheet of silver rain, or the Night Scene set itself in a plushy black fog that fairly crinkled your senses; when the Leading Lady's eyes narrowed for the first time to the Leading Man's startled stare, and the song you had introduced so casually at the last moment in the last act proved to be the reforming point in the Villain's nefarious career, and the one character you had picked for "Comic Relief" turned out to be the Tragedienne, who in the world was left for your elbow to nudge?

Swinging back to the breakfast-room I heard the clock strike ten—only ten?

It was going to be a nice little Play all right! Starting off already with several quite unexpected situations! And it wouldn't be the first time by any means that in an emergency I had been obliged to "double" as prompter and stage hand or water carrier and critic. But how to double as elbow-nudger I couldn't quite figure.

"Let's go for a tramp on the beach!" suggested the Bridegroom. Always on the first rainy morning immediately after breakfast

some restive business man suggests "a tramp on the beach!" Frankly we have reached a point where we quite depend on it for a cue.

Everybody hailed the proposition with delight except Allan John and Rollins. A zephyr would have blown Allan John from his footing. And Rollins had to stay in his room to catalogue shells. . . . Rollins was paid to stay in his room and catalogue shells!

Of the five adventurers who essayed to sally forth, only one failed to clamor for oil-skins. You couldn't really blame the Bride for her lack of clamoring. . . . The Bride's trousseau was wonderful as all trousseaux are bound perforce to be that are made up of equal parts of taste,—money,—fashion,—and passion. No one who had "saved up" such a costume as the Bride had for the first rainy day together, could reasonably be expected to doff it for yellow oil-skins. Of some priceless foreign composition, half cloth, half mist, indescribably shimmering, almost indecently feminine, with the frenchiest sort of a little hat gaily concocted of marshgrass and white rubber pond-lilies, it gave her lovely, somewhat classic type, all the sudden auda-

cious effect somehow of a water-proofed valentine.

Young Kennilworth sensed the inherent contrast at once.

"Beside you," he protested, "we look like Yellow Telegrams! . . . Your Husband there is some Broker's Stock Quotation—sent 'collect!' . . . Mr. Keets is a rather heavily-worded summons to address the Alumnæ of Something-or-other College! . . . I am a Lunch Invitation to 'Miss Dancy-Prancy of the Sillies!' . . . And you, of course, Miss Davies," he quickened delightedly, "are a Night Letter, because you are so long—and inconsequent—all about rabbits—and puppies—and kiddie things like checked gingham pinafores!"

Laughing, teasing, arguing, jeering each other's oil-skins, praising the Bride's splendor, they swept, a young hurricane of themselves, out into the bigger hurricane of sea and sky, and still five abreast, still jostling, still teasing, still arguing, passed from sight around the storm-swept curve of the beach, while I stayed behind to read aloud to Allan John.

Not that Allan John listened at all. But merely because every time I stopped reading

he struggled up from the lovely soggy depths of his big leather chair and began to worry. We read two garden catalogues and a chapter on insect pests. We read a bit of Walter Pater, and five exceedingly scurrilous poems from a volume of free verse. It seemed to be the Latin names in the garden catalogues that soothed him most. And when we weren't reading, we drank malted milk. Allan John, it seemed, didn't care for cocoa.

But even if I hadn't had Allan John on my mind I shouldn't have gone walking on the beach. We have always indeed made it a point not to walk on the beach with our guests on the first rainy, restive morning of their arrival. In a geographical environment where every slushy step of sand, every crisp rug of pebbles, every wind-tortured cedar root, every salt-gnawed crag is as familiar to us as the palms of our own hands, it is almost beyond human nature not to try and steer one's visitors to the preferable places, while the whole point of this introductory expedition demands that the visitors shall steer themselves. In the inevitable mood of uneasiness and dismay that overwhelms most house party guests when first thrust into each other's un-

familiar faces, the initial gravitations that ensue are rather more than usually significant. To be perfectly explicit, for instance, people who start off five abreast on that first rainy walk never come home five abreast!

In the immediate case at hand, nobody came home at all until long after Allan John and I had finished our luncheon, and in the manner of that coming, George Keets had gravitated to leadership with the Bride and Bridegroom. Very palpably with the Bridegroom's assistance he seemed to be coaxing and urging the Bride's frankly jaded footsteps, while young Kennilworth and the May Girl brought up the rear staggering and lurching excitedly under the weight of a large and somewhat mysteriously colored wooden box.

The Bridegroom and George Keets and young Kennilworth and the May Girl were as neat as yellow paint. But the poor Bride was ruined. Tattered and torn, her diaphanous glory had turned to real mist before the onslaught of wind and rain. Her hat was swamped, her face streaked with inharmonious colors. She was drenched to the skin. Her

Bridegroom was distracted with anxiety and astonishment.

Everybody was very much excited! Lured by some will-o'-the-wisp that lurks in waves and beaches they had lost their way it seems between one dune and another, staggered up sand-hills, fallen down sand-hills, sheltered themselves at last during the worst gust of all "in a sort of a cave in a sort of a cliff" and sustained life very comfortably "thank you" on some cakes of sweet chocolate which George Keets had discovered most opportunely in his big oil-skin pockets!

But most exciting of all they had found a wreck! "Yes, a real wreck! A perfectly lovely—beautiful—and quite sufficiently gruesome real wreck!" the May Girl reported.

Not exactly a whole wreck it had proved to be . . . Not shattered spars and masts and crumpled cabins with plush cushions floating messily about. But at least it was a real trunk from a real wreck! Mrs. Brenswick had spied it first. Just back of a long brown untidy line of flotsam and jetsam, the sea-weeds, the dead fish, the old bales and boxes, that every storm brings to the beach, Mrs. Brenswick had spied the trunk

lurching up half-imbedded in the sand. It must have come in on the biggest wave of all some time during the night. It was "awfully wet" and yet "not so awfully wet." Everybody agreed that is, that it wasn't water-logged, that it hadn't, in short, been rolling around in the sea for weeks or months but bespoke a disaster as poignantly recent as last night, on the edge of this very storm indeed that they themselves were now frivoling in. For fully half an hour, it appeared before even so much as touching the trunk, they had raced up and down the beach hunting half hopefully, half fearfully for some added trace of wreckage, the hunched body even of a survivor. But even with this shuddering apprehension once allayed, the original discovery had not proved an altogether facile adventure.

It had taken indeed at the last all their combined energies and ingenuities to open the trunk. The Bride had broken two finger nails. George Keets had lost his temper. Paul Brenswick in a final flare of desperation had kicked in the whole end with an abandon that seemed to have been somewhat of an astonishment to everybody. Even from the

first young Kennilworth had contested "that the thing smelt dead." But this unhappy odor had been proved very fortunately to be nothing more nor less than the rain-sloughed coloring matter of the Bride's pond-lily hat.

"And here is what we found in the trunk!" thrilled the Bride. In the palm of her extended hand lay a garnet necklace, — fifty stones perhaps, flushing crimson-dark in a silver setting of such unique beauty and such unmistakable Florentine workmanship as stamped the whole trinket indisputably "precious," if not the stones themselves.

"And there were women's dresses in it," explained Paul Brenswick. "Rather queer-looking dresses and——"

"Oh, it was the — the — funniest trunk!" cried the May Girl. "All—" Her eyes were big with horror.

"Anybody could have Sherlocked at a glance," sniffed young Kennilworth, "that it had been packed by a crazy person!"

"No, I don't agree to that at all!" protested the Bride, whose own trunk-packing urgencies and emergencies were only too recent in her mind. "Anybody's liable to pack a trunk like that when he's moving! The last trunk

of all! Every left-over thing that you thought was already packed or that you had planned to tuck into your suitcase and found suddenly that you couldn't."

"Why, there was an old-fashioned copper chafing dish!" sniffed young Kennilworth. "And the top-drawer of a sewing-table fairly rattling with spools!"

"And books!" frowned George Keets. "The weirdest little old edition of 'Pilgrim's Progress'!"

"And toys!" quivered the May Girl. "A perfectly gorgeous brand new box of 'Toy Village'! As huge as— Oh it was awful!"

"As huge as—that!" kicked young Kennilworth wryfully against the box at his feet. "I wanted to bring the chafing dish," he scolded, "but nothing would satisfy this young idiot here except that we lug the 'Toy Village.'"

"One couldn't bring — everything all at once," deprecated the May Girl. "Perhaps to-morrow—if it isn't too far—and we ever could find it again——"

"But why such haste about the 'Toy Village'?" I questioned. "Why not the dresses? The——"

Hopelessly, but with her eyes like blue skies, her cheeks like apple-blossoms, the May Girl tried to justify her mental processes. "Probably I can't explain exactly," she admitted, "but books and dishes and dresses being just things wouldn't mind being drowned — but toys, I think, would be frightened." With a frank expression of shock she stopped suddenly and stared all around her. "It doesn't quite make sense when you say it out loud, does it?" she reflected. "But when you just feel it—inside——"

"I brought the little 'Pilgrim's Progress' back with me," confessed George Keets with the faintest possible smile. "Not exactly perhaps because I thought it would be 'frightened.' But two nights' shipwreck on a New England coast in this sort of weather didn't seem absolutely necessary."

"And I brought the dinkiest little pearl-handled pistol," brightened Paul Brenswick. "It's a peach! Tucked into the pocket of an old blue cape it was! Wonder I ever found it!"

From a furious rummaging through her pockets the May Girl suddenly withdrew her hand.

"Of course, we'll have to watch the ship-wreck news," said the May Girl. "Or even advertise, perhaps. So maybe there won't be any real treasure-trove after all. But just to show that I thought of you, Mrs. Delville," she dimpled, "here are four very damp spools of red sewing-silk for your own work-table drawer! Maybe they came all the way from China! And here's a—I don't know what it is, for Allan John—I think it's a whistle! And here's a little not-too-soggy real Morocco-bound blank book for Mr. Rollins when he comes down-stairs again! And——"

"And for Mr. Delville?" I teased. "And for Ann Woltor?"

With her hand slapped across her mouth in a gesture of childish dismay, the May Girl stared round at her companions.

"Oh dear—Oh dear—Oh *dear!*" she stammered. "None of us ever thought once of poor Mr. Delville and Miss Woltor!"

"It's hot eatments and drinkments that you'd better be thinking of now!" I warned them all with real concern. "And blanket-wrappers! And downy quilts! Be off to your rooms and I'll send your lunches up after you! And don't let one of you dare show his

drenched face down-stairs again until supper-time!"

Then Allan John and I resumed our reading aloud. We read Longfellow this time, and a page or two of Marcus Aurelius, and half a detective story. And substituted orange juice very mercifully for what had grown to be a somewhat monotonous carousal in malted milk. Allan John seemed very much gratified with the little silver whistle from the shipwreck, and showed quite plainly by various pursings of his strained lips that he was fairly yearning to blow it, but either hadn't the breath, or else wasn't sure that such a procedure would be considered polite. Really by six o'clock I had grown quite fond of Allan John. It was his haunted eyes, I think and the lovely lean line of his cheek. But whether he was animal—vegetable—mineral—Spirituelle—or Intellectuelle, I, myself, was not yet prepared to say.

The supper hour passed fortunately without fresh complications. Everybody came down! Everybody's eyes were like stars! And everybody's complexion lashed into sheer gorgeousness by the morning's mad buffet of wind and wave! Best of all, no one sneezed.

Our little Bride was a dream again in a very straight, very severe gray velvet frock that sheathed her young suppleness like the suppleness of a younger Crusader. Her regenerated beauty was an object-lesson to all young husbands' pocket-books for all time to come that beauty like love is infinitely more susceptible to bad weather than is either homeliness or hate, and as such must be cherished by a man's brain as well as by his brawn. Paul Brenswick, goodness knows, would never need to choose his Bride's clothes for her. But lusty young beauty-lover that he was by every right of clean heart and clean living, it was up to him to see that his beloved was never financially hampered in her own choosing! A non-extravagant bride, wrecked as his bride had been by the morning's tempest, might not so readily have recovered her magic.

The May Girl, as usual, was like a spray of orchard bloom in some white, frothy, middy blouse sort of effect. With the May Girl's peculiarly fragrant and insouciant type of youthfulness one never noted somehow just what she wore, nor rated one day's mood of loveliness against another. The essential

miracle, as of May-time itself, lay merely in the fact that she was here.

Everybody talked, of course, about the shipwreck.

The Bride did not wear her necklace. "It was too ghostly," she felt. But she carried it in her hand and brooded over it with the tender, unshakable conviction that once at least it must have belonged to "another Bride."

Rollins, I thought, was rather unduly enthusiastic about his share of the booty. Yet no one who knew Rollins could ever possibly have questioned the absolute sincerity of him. Note-books, it appeared, were a special hobby of his! Morocco-bound note-books particularly. And when it came to faintly soggy Morocco-bound note-books, words were inadequate it seemed to express his appreciation. Nothing would do but the May Girl must inscribe it for him. "Aberner Rollins," she wrote very carefully in her round, childish hand, with a giggly flourish at the tail-tip of each word. "For Aberner Rollins from his friend May Davies. Awful Shipwreck Time, May 10th, 1919." Rollins used an inestimable number of note-books it appeared in the collection

of his statistics. "The collection of statistics was the consuming passion of his life," he confided to everybody. "The consuming passion!" he reiterated emphatically. "Already," he affirmed, "he had revised and reaudited the whole fresh-egg-account of his own family for the last three generations! In a single slender tone," he bragged, "he held listed the favorite flowers of all living novelists both of America and England! Another tome bulged with the evidence that would-be suicides invariably waited for pleasant weather in which to accomplish their self-destruction! In regard to the little black Morocco volume," he kindled ecstatically, "he had already dedicated it to a very interesting new thought which had just occurred to him that evening, apropos of a little remark—a most significant little remark that had been dropped during the breakfast chat. . . . If anyone was really interested—" he suggested hopefully.

Nobody was the slightest bit interested! Nobody paid the remotest attention to him! Everybody was still too much excited about the shipwreck, and planning how best to salvage such loot as remained.

"And maybe by to-morrow there'll be even

more things washed up!" sparkled the May Girl. "A real India shawl perhaps! A set of chess-men carved from a whale's tooth! Only, of course—if it should rain as hard—" she drooped as suddenly as she had sparkled.

"It can't!" said young Kennilworth. Even with the fresh crash of wind and rain at the casement he made the assertion arrogantly. "It isn't in the mind of God," he said, "to make two days as rainy as this one." The little black Pomeranian believed him anyway, and came sniffing out of the shadows to see if the arrogantly gesticulative young hand held also the gift of lump sugar as well as of prophecy.

It was immediately after supper that the May Girl decided to investigate the possibilities and probabilities of her "toy village."

Somewhat patronizingly at first but with a surprisingly rapid kindling of enthusiasm, young Kennilworth conceded his assistance.

The storm outside grew wilder and wilder. The scene inside grew snugger and snugger. The room was warm, the lamps well shaded, the tables piled with books, the chairs themselves deep as waves. "Loaf and let loaf" was the motto of the evening.

By pulling the huge wolf-skin rug away from the hearth, the May Girl and young Kennilworth achieved for their village a plane of smoothness and light that gleamed as fair and sweet as a real village common at high noon. Curled up in a fluff of white the May Girl sat cross-legged in the middle of it superintending operations through a maze of sunny hair. Stretched out at full-length on the floor beside her, looking for all the world like some beautiful exotic-faced little lad, young Kennilworth lay on his elbows, adjusting, between incongruous puffs of cigarette smoke, the faintly shattered outline of a miniature church and spire, or soothing a blister of salt sea tears from the paint-crackled visage of a tiny villa. Softly the firelight flickered and flamed across their absorbed young faces. Mysteriously the wisps of cigarette smoke merged realities with unrealities.

It was an entrancing picture. And one by one everybody in the room except Rollins and myself became drawn more or less into it.

"If you're going to do it at all," argued Paul Brenswick, "you might as well do it right! When you start in to lay out a village you know there are certain general scientific

principles that must be observed. Now that list to the floor there! What about drainage? Can't you see that you've started the whole thing entirely wrong?"

"But I wanted it to face toward the fire," drooped the May Girl, "like a village looking on the wonders of Vesuvius."

"Vesuvius nothing!" insisted Paul Brenswick. "It's got to have good drainage!"

Enchanted by his seriousness, the Bride rushed off up-stairs with her scissors to rip the foliage off her second-best hat to make a hedge for the church-yard. Even Allan John came sliding just a little bit out of his chair when he noted that there was a large, rather humpy papier-mâché mountain in the outfit that seemed likely to be discarded.

"I would like to have that mountain put —there!" he pointed. "Against that table shadow . . . And the mountain's name is Blue Blurr!"

"Oh, very well," acquiesced everybody. "The mountain's name is Blue Blurr!" It was George Keets who suggested taking the little bronze Psyche from the mantelpiece to make a monument for the public square. "Of course there'll be some in your village," he

deprecated, "who'll object to its being a nude. But as a classic it——"

"It's a bear! It's a bear! It's a bear!" chanted Kennilworth in exultant falsetto. "Speaking of classics!"

"Hush!" said George Keets. . . . George Keets really wanted very much to play, I think, but he didn't know exactly how to, so he tried to talk highbrow instead. "This village of yours," he frowned, "I—I hope it's going to have good government?"

"Well, it isn't!" snapped young Kennilworth. "It's going to be a terror! But at least it shall be pretty!"

Under young Kennilworth's crafty hand the little village certainly had bloomed from a child's pretty toy into the very real beauty of an artist's ideal. The skill of laying out little streets one way instead of another, the decision to place the tiny red schoolhouse here instead of there, the choice of a linden rather than a pinetree to shade an infinitestimal green-thatched cottage, had all combined in some curious twinge of charm to make your senses yearn—not that all that cunning perfection should swell suddenly to normal real estate dimensions — but that you, reduced by some

lovely miracle to toy-size, might slip across that toy-sized greensward into one of those toy-sized houses, and live with toy-sized passions and toy-sized ambitions and toy-sized joys and toy-sized sorrows, one single hour of a toy-sized life.

Everybody, I guess, experienced the same strange little flutter.

"That house shall be mine!" affirmed George Keets quite abruptly. "That gray stone one with the big bay-window and the pink rambler rose. The bay-window room I'm sure would make me a fine study. And——"

From an excessively delicate readjustment of a loose shutter on a rambling brown bungalow young Kennilworth looked up with a certain flicker of exasperation.

"Live anywhere you choose!" he snapped. "Miss Davies and I are going to live—here!"

"W—What?" stammered the May Girl. "What?"

"Here!" grinned young Kennilworth.

"Oh—no," said the May Girl. Without showing the slightest offense she seemed suddenly to be quite positive about it. "Oh, no! —If I live anywhere it's going to be in the

gray stone house with Mr. Keets. It's so infinitely more convenient to the schools."

"To the what?" chuckled Kennilworth. Before the very evident astonishment and discomfiture in George Keets's face, his own was convulsed with joy.

"To the schools," dimpled the May Girl.

"You do me a—a very great honor," bowed George Keets. His face was scarlet.

"Thank you," said the May Girl.

In the second's somewhat panicky pause that ensued Rollins flopped forward with his note-book. Rollins evidently had been waiting a long and impatient time for such a pause.

"Now speaking of drinking to drown one's sorrows—" beamed Rollins.

"But we weren't!" observed George Keets coldly.

"But you were this morning!" triumphed Rollins. From the flapping white pages of the little black note-book he displayed with pride the entries that he had already made, —a separate name heading each page—Mrs. Delville — Mr. Delville — Mr. Keets — Miss Davies—the list began. "Now take the hypothesis," glowed Rollins, "that everybody has got just two bottles stowed away for all

time,—the very last bottles I mean that he will ever own, rum — rye — benedictine — anything you choose—and eliminating the first bottle as the less significant of the two—what are you saving the last one for?" demanded Rollins.

From a furtive glance at Allan John's graying face and the May Girl's somewhat startled stare, young Kennilworth looked up with a rather peculiarly glinting smile.

"Oh, that's easy," said he, "I'm saving mine to break the head of some bally fool!"

"And my last bottle," interposed George Keets quickly. "My last bottle—?" In his fine ascetic face the flush deepened suddenly again, but with the flush the faintest possible little smile showed also at the lip-line. "Oh, I suppose if I'm really going to have a wedding—in that little gray toy house, it's up to me to save mine for a 'Loving Cup' . . . claret . . . Something very mild and rosy . . . Yes, mine shall be claret."

With her pretty nose crinkled in what seemed like a particularly abstruse reflection, the May Girl glanced up.

"Bene—benedictine?" she questioned. "Is

that the stuff that smells the way stars would taste if you ate them raw?"

"I really can't say," mused Kennilworth. "I don't think I ever ate a perfectly raw star. At the night-lunch carts I think they almost invariably fry them on both sides."

"Night-lunch carts?" scoffed Keets, with what seemed to me like rather unnecessary acerbity. "N—o, somehow I don't seem to picture you in a night-lunch cart when it comes time to share your last bottle of champagne with—with—'Miss Dancy-Prancy—of the Sillies,'—wasn't it?"

"My last bottle isn't champagne!" flared young Kennilworth. "It's scotch! . . . And there'll be no Miss Anybody in it, thank you!" His face was really angry, and one twitch of his foot had knocked half his village into chaos. "Oh, all right, I'll tell you what I'm going to do with my last bottle!" he frowned. "The next-to-the-last-one, as you say, is none of your business! But the last one is going to my Old Man! . . . I come from Kansas," he acknowledged a bit shamefacedly. "From a shack no bigger than this room . . . And my Old Man lives there yet . . . And he's always been used to having a taste of some-

thing when he wanted it and I guess he misses it some. . . . And he'll be eighty years old the 15th of next December. I'm going home for it. . . . I haven't been home for seven years. . . . But my Old Man is going to get his scotch! . . . If they yank me off at every railroad station and shoot me at sunrise each new day,—my Old Man is going to get his scotch!"

"Bully for you," said George Keets.

"All the same," argued the May Girl, "I think benedictine smells better."

With a little gaspy breath somebody discovered what had happened to the Village.

"Who did that?" demanded Paul Brenswick.

"You did!" snapped young Kennilworth.

"I didn't, either," protested Brenswick.

"Why of all cheeky things!" cried the Bride.

"Now see here," I admonished them, "you're all very tired and very irritable. And I suggest that you all pack off to bed."

Helping the May Girl up from her cramped position, George Keets bent low for a single exaggerated moment over her proffered hand.

"I certainly think you are making a mis-

take, Miss Davies," bantered young Kennilworth. "For a long run, of course, Mr. Keets might be better, but for a short run I am almost sure that you would have been jollier in the brown bungalow with me."

"Time will tell," dimpled the May Girl.

"Then I really may consider us—formally engaged?" smiled George Keets, still bending low over her hand. He was really rather amused, I think—and quite as much embarrassed as he was amused.

"No, not exactly formally," dimpled the May Girl. "But until breakfast time to-morrow morning."

"Until breakfast time to-morrow morning," hooted young Kennilworth. "That's the deuce of a funny time-limit to put on an engagement . . . It's like asking a person to go skating when there isn't any ice! . . ."

"Is it?" puzzled the May Girl.

"What the deuce do you expect Keets to get out of it?" quizzed young Kennilworth.

In an instant the May Girl was all smiles again. "He'll get mentioned in my prayers," she said. "'Please bless Mr. Keets, my fiancé-till-to-morrow-morning.'"

"That's certainly — something," conceded George Keets.

"It isn't enough,"—protested Kennilworth.

The May Girl stared round appealingly at her interlocutors.

"But the time is so awfully short," she said, "and I did want to get engaged to as many boys as possible in the week I was here."

"What—what!" I babbled.

"Yes, for very special reasons," said the May Girl, "I *would* like to get engaged to as many——"

With a strut like the strut of a young bantam rooster, Rollins pushed his way suddenly into the limelight.

"If it will be the slightest accommodation to you," he affirmed, "you may consider yourself engaged to me to-morrow!"

Disconcerted as she was, the May Girl swallowed the bitter, unexpected dose with infinitely less grimace than one would have expected. She even smiled a little.

"Very well, Mr. Rollins," she said, "I will be engaged to you—to-morrow."

Young Kennilworth's dismay exploded in a

single exclamation. "Well — you — certainly are an extraordinary young person!"

"Yes, I know," deprecated the May Girl. "It's because I'm so tall, I suppose——"

Before the unallayed breathlessness of my expression she wilted like a worried flower.

"Yes, of course, I know, Mrs. Delville," she acknowledged, "that mock marriages aren't considered very good taste . . . But a mock engagement?" she wheedled. "If it's conducted, oh, very — very — very properly?" Her eyes were wide with pleading.

"Oh, of course," I suggested, "if it's conducted very—*very*—*very* properly!"

Across the May Girl's lovely pink and white cheeks the dark lashes fringed down.

"There—will—be—no—kissing," affirmed the May Girl.

"Oh, Shucks!" protested young Kennilworth. "Now you've spoiled everything."

Out of the corner of one eye I saw Rollins nudge Paul Brenswick. It was not a facetious nudge, but one quite markedly earnest. The whole expression indeed on Rollins's face was an expression of acute determination.

With laughter and song and a flicker of candlelight everybody filed up-stairs to bed.

Rollins carried his candle with the particularly unctuous pride of one who leads a torchlight procession. And as he turned on the upper landing and looked back, I noted that behind the almost ribald excitement on his face there lurked a look of poignant wistfulness.

"I've never been engaged before," he confided grinningly to Paul Brenswick. "I'd like to make the most of it . . ."

Passing into my own room I flung back the casement windows for a revivifying slash of wind and rain, before I should collapse utterly into the white scrumptiousness of my bed. Frankly, I was very tired.

It must have been almost midnight when I woke to see my Husband's dark figure silhouetted in the bright square of the door. Through the depths of my weariness a consuming curiosity struggled.

"Did Ann Woltor come back?" I asked.

"She did!" said my Husband succinctly.

"And how did you get on with Allan John?"

"Oh, I'm crazy about Allan John," I yawned amiably. And then with one of those perfectly inexplainable nerve-explosions that

astonishes no one as much as it astonishes oneself I struggled up on my elbow.

"But he's still got my best silver saltshaker in his pocket!" I cried.

It was then that the scream of a siren whistle tore like some fear-maddened voice through the whole house. Shriller than knives it ripped and screeched into the senses! Doors banged! Feet thudded!

"There's Allan John now!" I gasped. "It's the whistle the May Girl gave him!"

CHAPTER III

EVERYBODY looked pretty tired when they came down to breakfast the next morning. But at least everybody came down. Even Rollins! Never have I seen Rollins so really addicted to coming down to breakfast!

Poor Allan John, of course, was all overwhelmed again with humiliation and despair, and quite heroically insistent on removing his presence as expeditiously as possible from our house party. It *was* his whistle that had screeched so in the night. And as far as he knew he hadn't the slightest reason or excuse for so screeching it beyond the fact that, rousing half-awake and half-asleep from a most horrible nightmare, he had reached instinctively for the little whistle under his pillow, and not realizing what he was doing, cried for help, not just to man alone it would seem, but to High Heaven itself!

"But however in the world did you happen

to have the whistle under your pillow?" puzzled the Bride.

"What else have I got?" answered Allan John.

He was perfectly right! Robbed for all time of his wife and child, stripped for the ill-favored moment of all personal moneys and proofs of identity, sojourning even in other men's linen, what did Allan John hold as a nucleus for the New Day except a little silver toy from another person's shipwreck? (Once I knew a smashed man who didn't possess even a toy to begin a new day on—so he didn't begin it!)

"Well, of course, it was pretty rackety while it lasted," conceded young Kennilworth. "But at least it gave us a chance to admire each other's lingeries."

"Negligées," corrected George Keets.

"I said 'scare-clothes'!" snapped young Kennilworth. "Everybody who travels by land or sea or puts in much time at house parties ought to have at least one round of scare-clothes, one really chic 'escaping suit.'"

"The silver whistle is mine," intercepted the May Girl with some dignity. "Mine and Allan John's. I found it and gave it to Allan

John. And he can blow it any time he wants to, day or night. But as long as you people all made so much fuss about it—and looked so funny," dimpled the May Girl transiently, "we will consider that after this—any time the whistle blows—the call is just for me." The May Girl's gravely ingenuous glance swept down in sudden challenge across the somewhat amused faces of her companions, "Allan John—is mine!" she confided with some incisiveness. "I found him—too!"

"Do you acknowledge that ownership, Allan John?" demanded young Kennilworth.

Even Allan John's sombre eyes twinkled the faintest possible glint of amusement.

"I acknowledge that ownership," acquiesced Allan John.

"Now see here!—I protest," rallied George Keets. "Most emphatically I protest against my fiancée assuming any masculine responsibilities except me during the brief term of our engagement!"

"But your engagement is already over!" jeered young Kennilworth. "Nice kind of Lochinvar you are—drifting down-stairs just exactly on the stroke of the breakfast bell!—'*until* breakfast time' were the terms, I be-

lieve. Now Rollins here has been up since dawn! Banging in and out of the house! Racing up and down the front walk in the rain! Now that's what I call real passion!

At the very first mention of his name Rollins had come sliding way forward to the edge of his chair. He hadn't apparently expected to be engaged till after breakfast. But if there was any conceivable chance, of course——

"All ready—any time!" beamed Rollins.

"*Through*—breakfast time was what I understood," said George Keets coldly.

"Through breakfast time was—was what I meant," stammered the May Girl. From the only too palpable excitement on Rollins's face to George Keets's chill immobility she turned with the faintest possible gesture of appeal. Her eyes looked suddenly just a little bit frightened. "A—after all," she confided, "I —I didn't know as I feel quite well enough to-day to be engaged so much. Maybe I caught a little cold yesterday. Sometimes I don't sleep very well. Once——"

"Oh, come now," insisted young Kennilworth. "Don't, for Heaven's sake, be a quitter!"

"A—'quitter'?" bridled the May Girl. Her

cheeks went suddenly very pink. And then suddenly very white. Like an angry little storm-cloud that absurd fluff of gray hair shadowed down for an instant across her sharply averted face. A glint of tears threatened. Then out of the gray and the gold and the blue and the pink and the tears, the jolliest sort of a little-girl-giggle issued suddenly. "Oh, all right!" said the May Girl and slipped with perfect docility apparently into the chair that George Keets had drawn out for her.

George Keets I really think was infinitely more frightened than she was, but in his case, at least, a seventeen years' lead in experience had taught him long since the advisability of disguising such emotions. Even at the dining-table of a sinking ship George Keets I'm almost certain would never have ceased passing salts and peppers, proffering olives and radishes, or making perfectly sure that your coffee was just exactly the way you liked it. In the present emergency, to cover not only his own confusion but the May Girl's, he proceeded to talk archæology. By talking archæology in an undertone with a faintly amorous inflection to the longest and least intelligible words, George Keets really be-

lieved I think that he was giving a rather clever imitation of an engaged man. What the May Girl thought no one could possibly have guessed. The May Girl's face was a study, but it was at least turning up to his! Whether she understood a single thing he said, or was only resting, whether she was truly amused or merely deferring as long as possible her unhappy fate with Rollins, she sat as one entranced.

Slipping into the chair directly opposite them, young Kennilworth watched the proceedings with malevolent joy. Between his very frank contempt for the dulness of George Keets's methods, and his perfectly palpable desire to keep poor Rollins tantalized as long as possible, he scarcely knew which side to play on.

Everybody indeed except Ann Woltor seemed to take a more or less mischievous delight in prolonging poor Rollins's suspense. Allan John never lifted his eyes from his coffee cup, but at least he showed no signs of disapproval or haste. Even George Keets, to the eyes of a close observer, seemed to be dallying rather unduly with his knife and fork as well as with his embarrassment.

As the breakfast hour dragged along, poor Rollins's impatience grew apace. Fidgeting round and round in his chair, scowling ferociously at anyone who dared to ask for a second service of anything, dashing out into the hall every now and then on perfectly inexplainable errands, he looked for all the world like some wry-faced clown performing by accident in a business suit.

"Really, Rollins," admonished my Husband. "I think it would have been a bit more delicate of you if you'd kept out of sight somehow till Keets' affair was over—this hovering round so through the harrowing last moments—all ready to pounce—hanged if I don't think it's crude!"

"Crude?—it's plain buzzard-y!" scoffed Kennilworth.

It was the Bride's warm, romantic heart that called the time-limit finally on George Keets's philandering.

"Really, I don't think it's quite fair," whispered the Bride. Taken all in all I think the Bridegroom was inclined to agree with her. But stronger than anybody's sense of justice, it was a composite sense of humor that sped Rollins to his heart's desire. Even Ann Wol-

tor, I think, was curious to see just how Rollins would figure as an engaged man.

The May Girl's parting with George Keets was at least mercifully brief.

"Does he kiss my hand?" questioned the May Girl.

"No—I think not," flushed George Keets. Having no intention in the world of kissing any woman in earnest, it was not in his code, apparently, to kiss a young girl in fun. Very formally, with that frugal, tight-lipped smile of his which contrasted so curiously with the rather accentuated virility of his shoulders, he rose and bowed low over the May Girl's proffered fingers. "Really it's been a great honor. I've enjoyed it immensely!" he conceded.

"Thank you," murmured the May Girl. In a single impulse everybody turned to look at Rollins, only to find that Rollins had disappeared.

"Hi, there, Rollins! *Rollins!*" shouted young Kennilworth. "You're losing time!"

As though waiting dramatically for just this cue, the hall portières parted slightly, and there stood Rollins grinning like a Cheshire Cat, with a great bunch of purple orchids clasped

in one hand! Now we are sixty miles from a florist and the only neighbor of our acquaintance who boasts a greenhouse is a most estimable but exceedingly close-fisted flower-fancier who might under certain conditions, I must admit, give bread at the back door, but who never under any circumstances whatsoever has been known to give orchids at the front door. Nor did I quite see Rollins even in a rain-storm actually breaking laws or glass to achieve his floral purpose. Yet there stood Rollins in our front hall, at half-past nine in the morning, with a very extravagant bunch of purple orchids in his hand.

"Well—bully for you!" gasped young Kennilworth. "Now that's what I call not being a mutt!"

Beaming with pride Rollins stepped forward and presented his offering, the grin on his face never wavering.

"Just a—just a trifling token of my esteem, Miss Davies!" he affirmed. "To say nothing of—of——"

The May Girl, I think, had never had orchids presented to her before. It is something indeed of an experience all in itself to see a young girl receive her first orchids. The

faint astonishment and regret to find that after all they're not nearly as darling and cosy as violets or roses or even carnations—the sudden contradictory flare of sex-pride and importance—flashed like so much large print across the May Girl's fluctuant face.

"Why—why they're—wonderful!" she stammered.

Producing from Heaven knows what antique pin-cushion a hat-pin that would have easily impaled the May Girl like a butterfly against the wall, Rollins completed the presentation. But the end it seemed was not yet. Fumbling through his pockets he produced a small wad of paper, and from that small wad of paper a large old-fashioned seal ring with several strands of silk thread dangling from it.

"Of course at such short notice," beamed Rollins, "one couldn't expect to do much. But if you don't mind things being a bit old-timey,—this ring of my great uncle Aberner's—if we tie it on—perhaps?"

Whereupon, lashing the ring then and there to the May Girl's astonished finger, Rollins proceeded to tuck the May Girl's whole astonished hand into the crook of his arm, and start off with her — still grinning — to promenade

the long sheltered glassed-in porch, across whose rain-blurred windows the storm raged by more like a sound than a sight.

The May Girl's face was crimson!

"Well—it was all your own idea, you know, this getting engaged!" taunted Kennilworth.

It was not a very good moment to taunt the May Girl. My Husband saw it I think even before I did.

"Really, Rollins," he suggested, "you mustn't overdo this arm-in-arm business. Not all day long! It isn't done! Not this ball-and-chain idea any more! Not this shackling of the betrothed!"

"No, really, Rollins, old man," urged young Kennilworth, "you've got quite the wrong idea. You say yourself you've never been engaged before, so you'd better let some of us wiser guys coach you up a bit in some of the essentials."

"Coach me up a bit?" growled Rollins.

"Why, you didn't suppose for a minute, did you," persisted young Kennilworth tormentingly, "that there was any special fun about being engaged? You didn't think for a moment, I mean, that you were really going to

have any sort of good time to-day? Not both of you, I mean?"

"Eh?" jerked Rollins, stopping suddenly short in his tracks, but with the May Girl's reluctant hand still wedged fast into the crook of his arm, he stood defying his tormentor. "Eh? *What?*"

"Why I never in the world," mused Kennilworth, "ever heard of two engaged people having a good time the same day. One or the other of them always has to give up the one thrilling thing that he yearned most to do and devote his whole time to pretending that he's perfectly enraptured doing some stupid fuddy-duddy stunt that the other one wanted to do. It's simply the question always of—who gives up! Now, Miss Davies for instance—" Mockingly he fixed his eyes on the May Girl's unhappy face. "Now, Miss Davies," he insisted, "more than anything else in the world to-day what would you like to do?"

"Sew," said the May Girl.

"And you, Mr. Rollins," persisted Kennilworth. "If it wasn't for Miss Davies here—what would you be doing to-day?"

"I?" quickened Rollins. "I?" across his impatient, irritated face, an expression of

frankly scientific ecstasy flared up like an explosion. "Why those shells, you know!" glowed Rollins. "That last consignment! Why I should have been cataloging shells!"

"There you have it!" cried Kennilworth. "Either you've got to sew all day long with Miss Davies — or else she'll have to catalog shells with you!"

"Sew?" hooted Rollins.

"Oh, I'd just love to catalog shells!" cried the May Girl. In that single instant the somewhat indeterminate quiver of her lips had bloomed into a real smile. By a dexterous movement, released from Rollins's arm, she turned and fled for the door. "Up-stairs, you mean, don't you?" she cried. The smile had reached her eyes now. In another minute it seemed as though even her hair would be all laughter. "At the big table in the upper hall? Where you were working yesterday? One, on one side of the table—and one—the other? And one, the *other!*" she giggled triumphantly.

With unflagging agility Rollins started after her.

"What I had really planned," he grinned, "was a walk on the beach."

"Arm — in — arm?" mused young Kennilworth.

"Eh! You think you're smart, don't you!" grinned Rollins.

"Yes, quite so," acknowledged Kennilworth. "But if you really want to see smartness on its native heath just pipe your eye to-morrow when I dawn on the horizon as an engaged man!"

"You?" called the May Girl. Staring back through the mahogany banisters her face looked fairly striped with astonishment.

"You certainly announced your desire," said Kennilworth, "to go right through the whole list. Didn't you?"

"Oh, but I didn't mean—everybody," parried the May Girl. Her mouth and her eyes and her hair were all laughing together now. "Oh, Goodness me—not *everybody!*" she gesticulated, with a fine air of disdain.

"Not the married men," explained the Bride.

"No, I'm sure she discriminated against the married men," chuckled the Bridegroom.

"Well — she sha'n't discriminate against *me!*" snapped young Kennilworth. Absurd as it was he looked angry. Young Kennil-

worth, one might infer, was not accustomed to having women discriminate against him. "You made the plan and you'll jolly-well keep to it!" affirmed young Kennilworth.

"Oh, all right," laughed the May Girl. "If you really insist! But for a boy who's as truly unselfish as you are about nursery-governessing other people's Pom dogs, and saving your last taste of anything for your old Old Daddy—you've certainly got the worst manners!"

"Manners!" drawled George Keets. "This is no test. Wait—till you see his engagement manners!"

"Oh, she'll 'wait' all right!" sniffed young Kennilworth, and turned on his heel.

Paul Brenswick, searching hard through the shipping news in the morning paper, looked up with a faint shadow of concern.

"What's the grouch?" he questioned.

Standing with her hands on her Bridegroom's shoulders the Bride glanced back from the stormy window to Kennilworth's face with a somewhat provocative smile.

"Well—it *was* in the mind of God, wasn't it?" she said.

"What was?" demanded young Kennilworth.

"The rain," shrugged the Bride.

"Oh—damn the rain!" cried young Kennilworth. "I wish people wouldn't speak to me! It drives me crazy I tell you to have everybody babbling so! Can't you see I want to work? Can't anybody see — anything?" Equally furious all of a sudden at everybody, he swung around and darted up the stairs. "Don't anybody call me to lunch," he ordered. "For Heaven's sake don't let anyone be idiot enough to call me to lunch."

Even Ann Woltor's jaw dropped a bit at the amazing rudeness and peevishness of it.

It was then that the beaming grin on Rollins's face flickered out for a single instant of incredulity and reproach.

"Why — Miss Woltor!" he choked, "you didn't have your tooth fixed—after all!"

With a great crackle of paper every man's face seemed buried suddenly in the shipping news.

"No!" I heard my Husband's voice affirm with extravagant precision. "not the slightest mention anywhere of any maritime disaster."

"Not the slightest!" agreed George Keets.

"Not the slightest!" echoed Paul Brenswick with what seemed to me like quite unnecessary monotony.

It was the Bride who showed the only real tact. Slipping her hand casually into Ann Woltor's hand she started for the Library.

"Let's go see if we can't find something awfully exciting to read to-day," she suggested. Once across the library threshold her voice lowered slightly. "Really, Miss Woltor," she confided, "there are times when I think that Mr. Rollins is sort of crazy."

"So many people are," acquiesced Ann Woltor without emotion.

Caroming off to my miniature conservatory on the pretext of watering my hyacinths I met my Husband bent evidently on the same errand. My Husband's sudden interest in potted plants was bewitching. Even the hyacinths were amused I think. Yet even to prolong the novelty of the situation there was certainly no time to be lost about Rollins.

"Truly Jack," I besought him, "this Rollins man has got to be suppressed."

"Oh, not to-day—surely?" pleaded my Husband. "Not on the one engagement day of

his life? Poor Rollins—when he's having such a thrill?"

"Well—not to-day perhaps," I conceded with some reluctance. "But to-morrow surely! We never have been used you know to starting off the day with Rollins! And two breakfasts in succession? Well, really, it's almost more than the human heart can stand. Far be it from me," I argued, "to condone poor Allan John's lapse from sobriety or advocate any plan whatsoever for the ensnaring of the very young or the unwary; but all other means failing," I argued, "I should consider it a very great mercy to the survivors if Rollins should wake to-morrow with a slight headache. No real cerebral symptoms you understand—nothing really acute. Just——!"

"Oh, stop your fooling!" said my Husband. "What I came in here to talk to you about was Miss Woltor."

"'Woltor' or 'Stoltor'?" I questioned.

"Who said 'Stoltor'?" jerked my Husband.

"Oh, sometimes you say 'Woltor' and sometimes you say 'Stoltor'!" I confided. "And it's so confusing. Which it it—really?"

"Hanged if I know!" said my Husband.

"Then let's call her Ann," I suggested.

With an impulse that was quite unwonted in him my Husband stepped suddenly forward to my biggest, rosiest, most perfect pot of pink hyacinths, and snapping a succulent stem in two thrust the great gorgeous bloom incongruously into his button-hole. Never in fifteen years had I seen my Husband with a flower in his button-hole. Neither, in all that time, had I ever seen him flush across the cheek-bones just exactly the shade of a rose-pink Hyacinth. I could have hugged him! He looked so confused.

"Oh, I say—" he ventured quite abruptly, "Miss Woltor and I, you know,—we never went near the dentist yesterday!"

"So I inferred," I said, "from Rollins's observation. What *were* you doing?" Truly I didn't mean to ask, but the long-suppressed wonder most certainly slipped.

"Why we were just arguing!" groaned my Husband. "Round and round and round!"

"Round — what?" I questioned — now that the slipping had started. "Round and round the country?"

"Country, no indeed!" grinned my Husband unhappily. "We never left the place!"

"Never — left the place?" I stammered. "Why, where in Creation were you?"

"Why, first," said my Husband, "we were down at the end of the driveway right there by the acacia trees, you know. She was crying so I didn't exactly like to strike the state highway for fear somebody would notice her. And then afterward—when I saw that she really couldn't stop——"

"Crying?" I puzzled. "Ann Woltor—crying?"

"And then afterward," persisted my Husband, "we went over to the Bungalow on the Rock—and commenced the argument all over again! Fortunately there was some tea there and crackers and sardines and enough firewood. But it was the devil and all getting over! We ran the car into the boat-house and took the punt! I thought the surf would smash us, but——"

"But what was the 'argument'?" I questioned.

"Why about her coming back!" said my Husband. "She was so absolutely determined not to come back! I never in my life saw such stubbornness! And if she once got away I knew perfectly well that she never would

come back! That she'd drop out of sight just as—— And such crying!" he interrupted himself with apparent irrelevance. "Everything smashed up altogether at once!—Hadn't cried before, she said, for eight years!"

"Well, it's time she cried, the poor dear!" I affirmed sincerely. "But——"

"But I couldn't bring her back to the house!" insisted my Husband. "Not crying so, not arguing so!"

"No, of course not," I agreed.

"I kept thinking she'd stop!" shivered my Husband.

"Jack," I asked quite abruptly, "Who *is* Ann Woltor?"

"Search me!" said my Husband, "I never saw her before."

"You — never saw her — before!" I stammered. "Why—why you called her by name! —you——"

"I knew her face," said my Husband. "I've seen her picture. In London it was. In Hal Ferry's studio. Fifteen years ago if it's a day. A huge charcoal sketch all swoops and smouches.—Just a girl holding up a small hand-mirror to her astonished face. — *'The woman with the broken tooth'* it was called."

"Fifteen years ago?" I gasped. "*'The—the woman with the broken tooth!'*—What a —what a name for a picture!"

"Yes, wasn't it?" said my Husband. "And you'd have thought somehow that the picture would be funny, wouldn't you? But it wasn't! It was the grimmest thing I ever saw in my life! Sketched just from memory too it must have been. No man would have had the cheek to ask a woman to pose for him like that,—to reduplicate just for fun I mean that particular expression of bewilderment which he had by such grim chance surprised on her unwitting face. Such shock! Such *astonishment!* It wasn't just the astonishment you understand of Marred Beauty worrying about a dentist. But a look—the stark, staring, chain-lightning sort of look of a woman who, back of the broken tooth, linked up in some way with the accident of the broken tooth, saw something, suddenly, that God Himself couldn't repair! It was horrid, I tell you! It haunted you! Even if you started to hoot you ended by arguing! Arguing and—wondering! Ferry finally got so that he wouldn't show it to anybody. People quizzed him so."

"Yes, but Ferry?" I questioned.

"No," said my Husband. "It was only by the merest chance that I heard the name Ann Stoltor associated in any way with the picture. Hal Ferry never told anything. Not a word. But he never exhibited the picture, I noticed. It was a point of honor with him, I suppose. If one lives long enough, of course, one's pretty apt to catch every friend 'off guard' at least once in his facial expression. But one doesn't exhibit one's deductions I suppose. One mustn't at least make professional presentation of them."

"Yes, but Ann Woltor—Stoltor," I puzzled. "When she tried to bolt so? Was it because she knew that you knew Hal Ferry? When you called her 'Stoltor' and dropped the lantern so funnily when you first saw her, was it *then* that she linked you up with this something—whatever it is that has hurt her so? —And determined even then to bolt at the very first chance she could get? But why in the world should she want to bolt?" I puzzled. "Certainly she's had to take us on faith quite as much as we've taken her. And I?—I *love* her!"

In the flare of the open doorway George Keets loomed quite abruptly.

"Oh, is this where you bad people are?" he reproached us. "We've been searching the house for you."

"Oh, of course, if you really need us," conceded my Husband. "But even you, I should think, would know a flirtation when you saw it and have tact enough not to butt in."

"A flirtation?" scoffed Keets. "You? At ten o'clock in the morning? All trimmed up like an Easter bonnet? And acting half scared to death? It looks a bit fishy to me, not to say mysterious!"

"All Husbands move in a mysterious way their flirtations to perform," observed my Husband.

From one pair of half-laughing eyes to the other George Keets glanced up with the faintest possible suggestion of a sigh.

"Really, you know," said George Keets, "there are times when even *I* can imagine that marriage might be just a little bit jolly."

"Oh never 'jolly'," grinned my Husband, "but there are times I frankly admit—when it seems a heap more serious than it does at—other times."

"Less serious, you mean," corrected Keets.

"More serious," grinned my Husband.

"Oh, for goodness sake, let's stop talking about us," I protested, "and talk about the weather!"

"It was the weather that I came to talk about," exclaimed George Keets. "Do you think it will clear to-day?" he questioned.

For a single mocking instant my Husband's glance sought mine.

"No, not—to-day, George," he said.

"U——m!" mused George Keets. "Then in that case," he brightened suddenly, "if Mrs. Delville is really willing to put up a water-proof lunch—we think it would be rather good sport to go back to the cave—and explore a bit more of the beach perhaps—and bring home Heaven knows what fresh plunder from the shipwrecked trunk."

"Oh, how jolly!" I agreed. "But will Mrs. Brenswick go?"

"Mrs. Brenswick isn't exactly keen about it," admitted Keets. "But she says she'll go. And Brenswick himself and Miss Woltor and Allan John—" It was amusing how everybody called Allan John "Allan John" without title or subterfuge or self-consciousness of any kind.

With their arms across each other's shoul-

ders the Bride and Bridegroom came frolicking by on their way to the foot of the stairs.

"Oh, Miss Davies!—Miss Davies!" they called up teasingly. "Are you willing that Allan John should go to the cave to-day?"

Smiling responsively but not one atom teased, the May Girl jumped up from her tableful of shells and came out to the edge of the balustrade to consider the matter.

"Allan John! Allan John!" she called. "Do you really want to go?"

"Why, yes," admitted Allan John, "if everybody's going."

Behind the May Girl's looming height and loveliness the little squat figure of Rollins shadowed suddenly.

"Miss Davies and I are not going," said Rollins.

"Not—going?" questioned the May Girl.

"Not going," chuckled Rollins, "unless she walks with me!" He didn't say "arm-in-arm." He didn't need to. That inference was entirely expressed by the absurdly triumphant little glint in his eye.

I don't think the May Girl intended to laugh. But she did laugh. And all the laugh in the world seemed suddenly "on" Rollins.

"No—really, People," rallied the May Girl, "I'd heaps rather stay here with Mr. Rollins and work on these perfectly darling shells. One—on one side of the table—and one on the other."

"We are going to have lunch up here—in fact," counterchecked that rascally Rollins with a blandness that was actually malicious. "There is a magnificent specimen here I notice of 'Triton's Trumpet.' The Pacific Islanders I understand use it very successfully for a tea-kettle. And for tea-cups. With the aid of one or two 'Hare's Ears' which I'm almost sure I've seen in the specimen cabinet——"

"'Hare's Ears'?" gasped the May Girl.

"It's the name of a shell, my dear,—just the name of a shell," explained Rollins with some unctuousness. "Very comfortable here we shall be, I am sure!" beamed Rollins. "Very cosy, very scientific, very ro-romantic, if I may take the liberty of saying so. Very—"

"Oh, Shucks!" interrupted George Keets quite surprisingly. "If Miss Davies isn't going there's no good in anybody going!"

"Thank—you," murmured Ann Woltor. At the astonishingly new and relaxed timbre

of her voice everybody turned suddenly and stared at her. It wasn't at all that she spoke meltingly, but the fact of her speaking meltedly, that gave every one of us that queer little gasp of surprise. Still icy cold, but fluid at last, her voice flowed forth as it were for the very first time with some faint suggestion of the real emotion in her mind. "Thank you—Mr. Keets," mocked Ann Woltor, "for your enthusiasm concerning the rest of us."

"Oh, I say!" deprecated George Keets. "You know what I meant!" His face was crimson. "It—it was only that Miss Davies was so awfully keen about it all yesterday! Everybody, you know, doesn't find it so exhilarating."

"No-o?" murmured Ann Woltor. In the plushy black somberness of her eyes a highlight glinted suddenly. Suppressed tears make just that particular kind of glint. So also does suppressed laughter. "I was out in a storm—once," drawled Ann Woltor, "I found it very—exhilarating."

With a flash of rather quizzical perplexity I saw my Husband's glance rake hers.

Wincing just a little she turned back to me with a certain gesture of appeal.

"Cry one day and laugh another, is it?" she ventured experimentally.

"Going to the dentist isn't very jolly—you're quite right," interposed the Bride.

"No, it certainly isn't," sympathized everybody.

It was perfectly evident that no one in the party except my Husband and myself knew just what had happened to the dentistry expedition. And Ann Woltor wasn't quite sure even yet, I could see, whether I knew or not. The return home the night before had been so late — the commotion over Allan John's whistle so immediate—the breakfast hour itself such a chaos of nonsense and foolery. Certainly there was no object in prolonging her uncertainty. I liked her infinitely too much to worry her. Very fortunately also she had a ready eye, the one big compensating gift that Fate bestows on all people who have ever been caught off their guard even once by a real trouble. She never muffed any glance I noticed that you wanted her to catch.

"Oh, I hate to think, Ann dear," I smiled, "about there being any tears yesterday. But if tears yesterday really should mean a laugh to-day——"

"Oh, to-day?" quickened Ann Woltor. "Who can tell about to-day!"

"Then you really would like to go?" said George Keets.

Across Ann Woltor's shoulders a little shrug quivered.

"Why, of course, I'm going!" said Ann Woltor.

"Good! Famous!" rallied George Keets. "Now that makes—how many of us?" he reckoned. "Kennilworth?"

"No, let's not bother about Kennilworth," said my Husband.

"You?" queried George Keets.

"Yes, I'm going," acquiesced my Husband.

"And you, Mrs. Delville, of course?"

"No, I think not," I said.

"Just the Brenswicks then," counted George Keets. "And Allan John and——"

Once again, from the railing of the upper landing, the May Girl's wistfully mirthful face peered down through that amazing cloud of gold-gray hair.

"Allan John—Allan John!" she called very softly. "I'd like to have you dress warmly—you know! And not get just too absolutely tired out! And be sure and take the whistle,"

she laughed very resolutely, "and if anybody isn't good to you—you just blow it hard—and I'll come."

As befitted the psychic necessities of a very cranky Person-With-a-Future, young Kennilworth was not disturbed for lunch.

And Rollins, it seemed, was grotesquely genuine in his desire to picnic up-stairs with the May Girl and the shells. Even the May Girl herself rallied with a fluttering sort of excitement to the idea. The shell table fortunately was quite large enough to accommodate both work and play. Rollins certainly was beside himself with triumph, and on Rollins's particular type of countenance there is no conceivable synonym for the word "triumph" except "ghoulish glee." Really it was amazing the way the May Girl rallied her gentleness and her patience and her playfulness to the absurd game. She opposed no contrary personality whatsoever even to Rollins's most vapid desires. Unable as he was either to simulate or stimulate "the light that never was on land or sea," it was Rollins's very evident intention apparently to "blue" his Lady's eyes and "pink" his Lady's cheeks by the narration at least of such sights as

"never were on land or sea"! Flavored by moonlight, rattling with tropical palms, green as Arctic ice, wild as a loon's hoot, science and lies slipped alike from Rollins's lips with a facility that even I would scarcely have suspected him of! Lands he had never visited —adventures he had never dreamed of—cannibals not yet born—babble—babble—*babble —babble!*

As for the May Girl herself, as far as I could observe, not a single sound emanated from her the entire day, except the occasional clank of her hugely over-sized "betrothal ring" against the Pom dog's collar, or the little gasping phrase, "Oh, no, Mr. Rollins! Not *really?*" that thrilled now and then from her astonished lips, as, elbows on table, chin cupped in hand, she sat staring blue-eyed and bland at her—tormentor.

It must have been five o'clock, almost, before the beach party returned. Gleaming like a great bunch of storm-drenched jonquils, the six adventurers loomed up cheerfully in the rain-light. Once again George Keets and the Bridegroom were dragging the Bride by her hand. Ann Woltor and my Husband followed just behind. Allan John walked alone.

Even young Kennilworth came out on the porch to hail them.

"Hi, there!" called my Husband.

"Hi, there, yourself!" retaliated Kennilworth.

"Oh, we've had a perfectly wonderful day!" gasped the Bride.

"Found the cave all right!" triumphed Keets.

"Allan John found a—found an old-fashioned hoop-skirt!" giggled the Bride.

"The devil he did!" hooted Rollins.

"But we never found the trunk at all!" scolded the Bridegroom. "Either we were way off in our calculations or else the sand—"

In a sudden gusty flutter of white the May Girl came round the corner into the full buffet of the wind. It hadn't occurred to me before just exactly how tired she looked. "Why, hello, everybody—" she began,—faltered an instant—crumpled up at the waist-line—and slipped down in a white heap of unconsciousness to the floor.

It was George Keets who reached her first, and gathering her into his long, strong arms, bore her into the house. It was the first time in his life I think that George Keets had

ever held a woman in his arms. His eyes hardly knew what to make of it. And his tightened lips, quite palpably, didn't like it at all. But after all it was those extraordinarily human shoulders of his that were really doing the carrying?

Very fortunately though for all concerned the whole scare was over in a minute. Ensconced like a queen in the deep pillows of the big library sofa the May Girl rallied almost at once to joke about the catastrophe. But she didn't want any supper, I noticed, and dallied behind in her cushions, when the supper-hour came.

"You look like a crumpled rose," said the Bride.

"Like a poor crumpled—white rose," supplemented Ann Woltor.

"Like a very long-stemmed—poor crumpled —white rose," deprecated the May Girl herself.

Kennilworth brought her a knife and fork, but no smiles.

George Keets brought her several different varieties of his peculiarly tight-lipped smile, and all the requisite table-silver besides.

Paul Brenswick sent her the cherry from

his cocktail and promised her the frosting from his cake.

The Bride sent her love.

Ann Woltor remembered the table napkin.

Allan John watched the proceedings without comment.

It was Rollins who insisted on serving the May Girl's supper. "It was his right," he said. More than this he also insisted on gathering up all his own supper on one quite inadequate plate, and trotting back to the library to eat it with the May Girl. This also was his right, he said. Truly he looked very funny there all huddled up on a low stool by the May Girl's side. But at least he showed sense enough now not to babble very much. And once, at least, without reproof I saw him reach up to the May Girl's fork and plate and urge some particularly nourishing morsel of food into her languidly astonished mouth.

It was just as everybody drifted back from the dining-room into the library that the May Girl wriggled her long, silken, childish legs out of the steamer-rug that encompassed her, struggled to her feet, wandered somewhat aimlessly to the piano, fingered the keys for a single indefinite moment—and burst ecstatically into song!

None of us, except my Husband, had heard her sing before. None of us indeed, except my Husband and myself, knew even that she could sing. The proof that she could smote suddenly across the ridge of one's spine like the prickle of a mild electric shock.

My Husband was perfectly right. It was a typical "Boy Soprano" voice, a chorister's voice—clear as flame—passionless as syrup. As devoid of ritual as the multiplication table it would have made the multiplication table fairly reek with incense and Easter lilies! Absolutely lacking in everything that the tone sharks call "color"—yet it set your mind a-haunt with all the sad crimson and purple splendors of memorial windows! Shadows were back of it! And sorrows! And mysteries! Bridals! And deaths! The prattle alike of the very young and the very old! Carol! And Threnody! And a fearful Transiency as of youth itself passing!

She sang—

"There is a Green Hill far away
Without a city wall,
Where our dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us—all."

and she sang

> "From the Desert I come to thee,
> On a stallion shod with—fire!
> And the winds are not more fleet
> Than the wings of my—de—sire!"

Like an Innocent pouring kerosene on the Flame-of-the-World the young voice soared and swelled to that lovely, limpid word "desire." (In the darkness I saw Paul Brenswick's hand clutch suddenly out to his Mate's. In the darkness I saw George Keets switch around suddenly and begin to whisper very fast to Allan John.) And then she sang a little nonsense rhyme about "Rabbits" which she explained rather shyly she had just made up. "She was very fond of rabbits," she explained. "And of dogs, too—if all the truth were to be told. Also cats."

"Also—shells!" sniffed young Kennilworth.

"Yes, also shells," conceded the May Girl without resentment.

"Ha!" sniffed young Kennilworth.

"O—h, a—jealous lover, this," deprecated George Keets. "Really, Miss Davies," he condoned, "I'm afraid to-morrow is going to be somewhat of a strain on you."

"To-morrow?" dimpled the May Girl.

"Ha!—To-morrow!" shrugged young Kennilworth.

"It was the rabbits," dimpled the May Girl, "that I was going to tell you about now. It's a very moral song written specially to deplore the—the thievish habits of the rabbits. But I can't seem to get around to the 'deploring' until the second verse. All the first verse is just scientific description." Adorably the young voice lilted into the nonsense—

"Oh, the habit of a rabbit
Is a fact that would amaze
From the pinkness of his blinkness and the blandness of his gaze,
In a nose that's so a-twinkle like a merri—perri—winkle—
And—"

Goodness me!—That *voice!*—The babyishness of it!—And the poignancy! Should one laugh? Or should one cry? Clap one's hands? Or bolt from the room? I decided to bolt from the room.

Both my Husband and myself thought it would be only right to telephone Dr. Brawne about the fainting spell. There was a tele-

phone fortunately in my own room. And there is one thing at least very compensatory about telephoning to doctors. If you once succeed in finding them, there is never an undue lag in the conversation itself.

"But tell me only just one thing," I besought my Husband, "so I won't be talking merely to a voice! This Dr. Brawne of yours? —Is he old or young? Fat or thin? Jolly? Or—?"

"He's about fifty," said my Husband. "Fifty-five perhaps. Stoutish rather, I think you'd call him. And jolly. Oh, I——"

"Ting-a-ling—ling—*ling!*" urged the telephone-bell.

Across a hundred miles of dripping, rain-bejeweled wires, Dr. Brawne's voice flamed up at last with an almost metallic crispness.

"Yes?"

"This is Dr. Brawne?"

"Yes."

"This is Mrs. Delville — Jack Delville's wife."

"Yes?"

"We just thought we'd call up and report the safe arrival of your ward and tell you how much we are enjoying her!"

"Yes?—I trust she didn't turn up with any more lame, halt, or blind pets than you were able to handle."

"Oh no—*no*—not at all!" I hastened to affirm. (Certainly it seemed no time to explain about poor Allan John.)

"But what I really called up to say," I hastened to confide, "is that she fainted this afternoon, and——"

"Yes?" crisped the clear incisive voice again.

"Fainted," I repeated.

"Yes?"

"*Fainted!*" I fairly shouted.

"Oh, I hardly think that's anything," murmured Dr. Brawne. His voice sounded suddenly very far away and muffled as though he were talking through a rather soggy soda biscuit. "She faints very easily. I don't find anything the matter. It's just a temporary instability, I think. She's grown so very fast."

"Yes, she's tall," I admitted.

"Everything else all right?" queried the voice. The wires were working better now. "I don't need to ask if she's having a good time," essayed the voice very courteously. "She's always so essentially original in her

ways of having a good time—even with strangers—even when she's really feeling rather shy."

"Oh, she's having a good time, all right," I hastened to assure him. "Three perfectly eligible young men all competing for her favor!"

"Only three?" laughed the voice. "You surprise me!"

"And speaking of originality," I rallied instantly to that laugh, "she has invented the most diverting game! She is playing at being-engaged-to-a-different-man—every day of her visit. Oh *very* circumspectly, you understand," I hastened to affirm. "Nothing serious at all!"

"No, I certainly hope not," mumbled the voice again through some maddeningly soggy connection. "Because, you see, I'm rather expecting to marry her myself on the fifteenth of September next."

CHAPTER IV

SLEEP is a funny thing! Really comical I mean! A magician's trick! "Now you have it—and now you don't!"

Certainly I had very little of it the night of Dr. Brawne's telephone conversation. I was too surprised.

Yet staring up through those long wakeful hours into the jetty black heights of my bedroom ceiling it didn't seem to be so much the conversation itself as the perfectly irrelevant events succeeding that conversation that kept hurtling back so into my visual consciousness —The blueness of the May Girl's eyes! The brightness of her hair!—Rollins's necktie! The perfectly wanton hideousness of Rollins's necktie!—The bang—*bang*—*bang* of a storm-tortured shutter way off in the ell somewhere.

Step by step, item by item, each detail of events reprinted itself on my mind. Fumbling back from the shadowy telephone-stand into the brightly lighted upper hall with the

single desire to find my Husband and confide to him as expeditiously as possible this news which had so amazed me, I had stumbled instead upon the May Girl herself, climbing somewhat listlessly up the stairs toward bed, Rollins was close behind her carrying her book and a filmy sky-blue scarf. George Keets followed with a pitcher of water.

"Oh, it isn't 'Good Night,' dear, is it?" I questioned.

"Yes," said the May Girl. "I'm—pretty tired." She certainly looked it.

Rollins quite evidently was in despair. He was not to accomplish his 'kiss' after all, it would seem. All the long day, I judged, he had been whipping up his cheeky courage to meet some magic opportunity of the evening. And now, it appeared, there wasn't going to be any evening! Even the last precious moment indeed was to be ruined by George Ketts's perfidious intrusion!

It was the Bride's voice though that rang down the actual curtain on Rollins's "Perfect Day."

"Oh, Miss Davies!—Miss Davies!" called the Bride. "You mustn't forget to return your ring, you know!"

"Why, no, so I mustn't," rallied the May Girl.

Twice I heard Rollins swallow very hard. Any antique was sacred to him, but a family antique. Oh, ye gods!

"K—K—Keep the ring!" stammered Rollins. It was the nearest point to real heroism surely that funny little Rollins would ever attain.

"Oh, no, indeed," protested the May Girl. Very definitely she snapped the silken threads, removed the clumsy bauble from her finger, and handed it back to Rollins. "But—but it's a beautiful ring!" she hastened chivalrously to assure him. "I'll—I'll keep the orchids!" she assented with real dimples.

On Rollins's sweating face the symptoms of acute collapse showed suddenly. With a glare that would have annihilated a less robust soul than George Keets's he turned and laid bare his horrid secret to an unfeeling Public.

"I'd rather you kept the *ring*," sweated Rollins. "The— The orchids have got to go back!—I only hired the orchids!—That is I—I bribed the gardener. They've got to be back by nine o'clock to-night. For some sort of a—a party."

"To-night?" I gasped. "In all this storm? Why, what if the May Girl had refused to—to——?"

In Rollins's small, blinking eyes, Romance and Thrift battled together in terrible combat.

"I gotta go back," mumbled Rollins. "He's got my watch!"

"Oh, for goodness sake you mustn't risk losing your watch!" laughed the May Girl.

George Keets didn't laugh. He hooted! I had never heard him hoot before, and ribald as the sound seemed emanating from his distinctly austere lips, the mechanical construction of that hoot was in some way strangely becoming to him.

The May Girl quite frankly though was afraid he had hurt Rollins's feelings. Returning swiftly from her bedroom with the lovely exotics bunched cautiously in one hand she turned an extravagantly tender smile on Rollins's unhappy face.

"Just— Just one of them," she apologized, "is crushed a little. I know you told me to be awfully careful of them. I'm very sorry. But truly," she smiled, "it's been perfectly wonderful—just to have them for a day! Thank you!—Thank you a whole lot, I mean!

And for the day itself—it's—it's been very—pleasant," she lied gallantly.

Snatching the orchids almost roughly from her hand Rollins gave another glare at George Keets and started for his own room. With his fingers on the door-handle he turned and glared back with particular ferocity at the May Girl herself. "Pleasant?" he scoffed. "*Pleasant?*" And crossing the threshold he slammed the door hard behind him.

Never have I seen anything more boorish!

"Why— Why, how tired he must be," exclaimed the May Girl.

"Tired?" hooted George Keets. He was still hooting when he joined the Bride and Bridegroom in the library.

It must have been fifteen minutes later that, returning from an investigation of the banging blind, I ran into Rollins stealing surreptitiously to the May Girl's door. Quite unconsciously, doubtless, but with most rapacious effect, his sparse hair was rumpled in innumerable directions, and the stealthy boy-pirate hunch to his shoulders added the last touch of melodrama to the scene. Rollins, as a gay Lothario, was certainly a new idea. I could have screamed with joy. But while I debated

the ethics of screaming for joy only, the May Girl herself, as though in reply to his crafty knock, opened her door and stared frankly down at him with a funny, flushed sort of astonishment. She was in her great boyish blanket-wrapper, with her gauzy gold hair wafting like a bright breeze across her neck and shoulders, and the radiance of her I think would have startled any man. But it knocked the breath out of Rollins.

"P-p-pleasant!" gasped Rollins, quite abruptly. "It was a—a *Miracle!*"

"—Miracle?" puzzled the May Girl.

"Wall-papers!" babbled Rollins. "Suppose it had been true?" he besought her. "To-day, I mean? Our betrothal?" With total unexpectedness he began to flutter a handfull of wall-paper samples under the May Girl's astonished nose. "I've got a little flat you know in town," babbled Rollins. "Just one room and bath. It's pretty dingy. But for a long time now I've been planning to have it all repapered. And if you'd choose the wall-paper for it—it would be pleasant to think of during—during the years!" babbled Rollins.

"*What?*" puzzled the May Girl. Then quite suddenly she reached out and took the papers

from Rollins's hand and bent her lovely head over them in perfectly solemn contemplation. "Why—why the pretty gray one with the white gulls and the flash of blue!" she decided almost at once, looked up for an instant, smiled straight into Rollins's fatuous eyes, and was gone again behind the impregnable fastness of her closed door, leaving Rollins gasping like a fool, his shoulders drooping, his limp hands clutching the sheet of white gulls with all the absurd manner of an amateur prima donna just on the verge of bursting into song!

And all of a sudden starting to laugh I found myself crying instead. It was the expression in Rollins's eyes, I think. The one "off-guard" expression perhaps of Rollins's life! A scorching flame of self-revelation, as it were, that consumed even as it illuminated, leaving only gray ashes and perplexity. Not just the look it was of a Little-Man-Almost-Old-who-had-Never-Had-a-Chance-to-Play. But the look of a Little-Man-Almost-Old who sensed suddenly for the first time that he never *would* have a chance to play! That Fate denying him the glint of wealth, the flash of romance, the scar even of tragedy, had

stamped him merely with the indelible sign of a Person-Who wasn't—Meant to-be-Liked!

Truly I was very glad to steal back into my dark room for a moment before trotting downstairs again to join all those others who were essentially intended for liking and loving, so eminently fitted, whether they refused or accepted it, for the full moral gamut of human experience.

On my way down it was only human, of course, to stop in the May Girl's room. Rollins or no Rollins it was the May Girl's problem that seemed to me the only really maddening one of the moment. What in creation was life planning to proffer the May Girl?—Dr. Brawne?—Dr. Brawne?—It wasn't just a question of Dr. Brawne! But a question of the May Girl herself?

She was still in her blanket-wrapper when I entered the room, but had hopped into bed, and sat bolt-up-right rocking vaguely, with her knees gathered to her chin in the circle of her slender arms.

"What seems to be the matter?" I questioned.

"That's what I don't know," she dimpled

almost instantly. "But I seem to be worrying about—something."

"Worrying?" I puzzled.

"Well,—maybe it's about the Pom dog," suggested the May Girl helpfully. "His mouth is so very—very tiny. Do you think he had enough supper?"

"Oh, I'm sure he had enough supper," I hastened to reassure her.

Very reflectively she narrowed her eyes to review the further field of her possible worries.

"That cat—that your Husband said he sent away just before I came for fear I'd bring some — some contradictory animals — are you quite sure that he's got a good home?" she worried.

"Oh, the best in the world," I said. "A Maternity Hospital!"

"Kittens?" brightened the May Girl for a single instant only. "Oh, you really mean kittens? Then surely there's nothing to worry about in that direction!"

"Nothing but—kittens," I conceded.

"Then it must be Allan John," said the May Girl. "His feet! Of course, I can't exactly help feeling pretty responsible for Allan John.

Are you sure — are you quite sure, I mean, that he hasn't been sitting round with wet feet all the evening? He isn't exactly the croupy type, of course, but—" With a sudden irrelevant gesture she unclasped her knees, and shot her feet straight out in front of her. "Whatever in the world," she cried out, "am I going to do with Allan John when it comes time to go home? Now gold-fish," she reflected, "in a real emergency,—can always be tucked away in the bath-tub. And once when I brought home a Japanese baby," she giggled in spite of herself, "they made me keep it in my own room. But——"

"But I've got a worry of my own," I interrupted. "It's about your fainting. It scared me dreadfully. I've just been telephoning to Dr. Brawne about it."

Across the May Girl's supple body a curious tightness settled suddenly.

"You—told—Dr. Brawne—that I—fainted?" she said. "You—you oughtn't to have done that!" It was only too evident that she was displeased.

"But we were worried," I repeated. "We had to tell him. We didn't like to take the responsibility."

With her childish hands spread flatly as a brace on either side of her she seemed to retreat for a moment into the gold veil of her hair. Then very resolutely her face came peering out again.

"And just what did Dr. Brawne—tell *you?*" asked the May Girl.

"Why something very romantic," I admitted. "The somewhat astonishing news, in fact, that you were engaged—to him."

"Oh, but you know, I'm *not!*" protested the May Girl with unmistakable emphasis. "No—No!"

"And that he was hoping to be married next September. On the 15th to be perfectly exact," I confided.

"Well, very likely I *shall* marry him," admitted the May Girl somewhat bafflingly. "But I'm not engaged to him now! Oh, I'm much too young to be engaged to him now! Why, even my grandmother thinks I'm much too young to be engaged to him now!—Why, he's most fifty years old!" she affirmed with widely dilating eyes. "—And I?—I've scarcely been off my grandmother's place, you know, until this last winter! But if I'm grown-up enough by September, they say—you see I'll be eigh-

teen and a half by September," she explained painstakingly, "so that's why I wanted to get engaged as much as I could this week!" she interrupted herself with quite merciless irrelevance. "If I've got to be married in September — without ever having been engaged or courted at all — I just thought I'd better go to work and pick up what experience I could— on my own hook!"

"Dr.—Dr. Brawne will, of course, make you a very distinguished husband," I stammered, "but are you sure you love him?"

"I love everybody!" dimpled the May Girl.

"Yes, dogs, of course," I conceded, "and rabbits—and horses and——"

"And kittens," supplemented the May Girl.

"Your mother is — not living?" I asked rather abruptly.

"My father is dead," said the May Girl. "But my mother is in Egypt." Her lovely face was suddenly all excitement. "My mother ran away!"

"Oh! An elopement, you mean?" I laughed. "Ran away with your father. Youngsters used to do romantic things like that."

"Ran away *from* my father," said the May Girl. "And from me. It was when I was four

years old. None of us have ever seen her since. It was with one of Dr. Brawne's friends that she ran away. That's one reason, I think, why Dr. Brawne has always felt so sort of responsible for me."

"Oh, dear—oh, dear, this is very sad," I winced.

"N-o," said the May Girl perfectly simply. "Maybe it was bad—but I'm almost sure it's never been sad. Dr. Brawne hears from her sometimes. Mother's always been very happy, I think. But everybody somehow seems to be in an awful hurry to get me settled."

"Why?" I asked quite starkly, and could have bitten my tongue out for my impertinence.

"Why—because I'm so tall, I suppose," said the May Girl. "And not so very specially bright. Oh, not nearly as bright as I am tall!" she hastened to assure me with her pretty nose all crinkled up for the sheer emphasis of her regret. "Life's rather hard, you know, on tall women," she confided sagely. "Always trying to take a tuck in them somewhere! Mother was tall," she observed; "and Father, they say, was always and forever trying to make her look smaller — especially

in public! Pulling her opinions out from under her! Belittling all her great, lovely fancies and ideas! Not that he really meant to be hateful, I suppose. But he just couldn't help it. It was just the natural male-instinct I guess of wanting to be the everythinger—himself!"

"What do—*you* know of 'the natural male instinct'?" I laughed out in spite of myself.

"Oh—lots," smiled the May Girl. "I have an uncle. And my grandmother always keeps two hired men. And for almost six months now I've been at the Art School. And there are twenty-seven boys at the Art School. Why there's Jerry and Paul and Richard and—and——"

"Yes, but your father and mother?" I pondered. "Just how——?"

"Oh, it was when they were walking downtown one day past a great big mirror," explained the May Girl brightly. "And Mother saw that she was getting round-shouldered trying to keep down to Father's level—it was then that she ran away! It was then that she began to run away I mean! To run away in her mind! I heard grandmother and Dr. Brawne talking about it only last summer.

But I?" she affirmed with some pride, "oh, I've known about being tall ever since I first had starch enough in my knees to stand up! While I stayed in my crib I don't suppose I noticed it specially. But just as soon as I was big enough to go to school. Why, even at the very first," she glowed, "when every other child in the room had failed without the slightest reproach some perfectly idiotic visitor would always pipe up and say, 'Now ask that—tall child there! The one with the yellow hair!' And everyone would be as vexed as possible because I failed, too! It isn't my head, you know that's tall," protested the May Girl with some feeling, "it's just my neck and legs!"

"You certainly are entrancingly graceful," I smiled. How anybody as inexpressibly lovely as the May Girl could be so oblivious of the fact was astonishing!

But neither smile nor compliment seemed to allay to the slightest degree the turmoil that was surging in the youngster's mind.

"Why, even at the Art School," she protested, "it's just as bad! Especially with the boys! Being so tall—and with yellow hair besides—you just can't possibly be as impor-

tant as you are conspicuous! And yet every individual boy seems obliged to find out for himself just exactly how important you are! But no matter what he finds," she shrugged with a gesture of ultimate despair, "it always ends by everybody getting mad!"

"Mad?" I questioned.

"Yes — very mad," said the May Girl. "Either he's mad because he finds you're not nearly as nice as you are conspicuous, or else, liking you most to death, he simply can't stand it that anyone as nice as he thinks you are is able to outplay him at tennis or—that's why I like animals best—and hurt things!" she interrupted herself with characteristic impetuosity. "Animals and hurt things don't care how rangy your arms are as long as they're loving! Why if you were as tall as a tree," she argued, "little deserted birds in nests would simply be glad that you could reach them that much sooner! But men? Why, even your nice Mr. Keets," she cried; "even your nice Mr. Keets, with his fussy old Archæology, couldn't even play at being engaged without talking down—down—down at me! Tall as he is, too! And funny little old Mr. Rollins," she flushed. "Little—*little*—

old Mr. Rollins—Mr. Rollins really liked me, I think, but he—he'd torture me if he thought it would make him feel any burlier!"

"And Claude Kennilworth," I questioned.

The shiver across the May Girl's shoulders looked suddenly more like a thrill than a distaste.

"Oh, Claude Kennilworth," she acknowledged quite ingenuously. "He's begun already to try to 'put me in my place'! Altogether too independent is what he thinks I am. But what he really means is 'altogether too tall'!" Once again the little shiver flashed across her shoulders. "He's so—so awfully temperamental!" she quickened. "Goodness knows what fireworks he'll introduce tomorrow! I can hardly wait!"

"Is—is Dr. Brawne—tall?" I asked a bit abruptly.

"N—o," admitted the May Girl. "He's quite short! But—his years are so tall!" she cried out triumphantly. "He's so tall in his attainments! I've thought it all out—oh very—very carefully," she attested. "And if I've got to be married in order to have some one to look out for me I'm almost perfectly positive that Dr. Brawne will be quite too

amused at having so young a wife to bully me very much about anything that goes with the youngness!"

"Oh—h," I said.

"Yes,—exactly," mused the May Girl.

With a heart and an apprehension just about as gray and as heavy as lead I rose and started for the door.

"But, May Girl?" I besought her in a single almost hysterical desire to rouse her from her innocence and her ignorance. "Among all this great array of men and boys that you know—the uncle—yes, even the hired men," I laughed, "and all those blue-smocked boys at the Art School—whom do you really like the best?"

So far her eyes journeyed off into the distance and back again I thought that she had not heard me. Then quite abruptly she answered me. And her voice was all boy-chorister again.

"The best?—why, Allan John!" she said.

Taken all in all there were several things said and done that evening that would have kept any normal hostess awake, I think.

The third morning dawned even rainier than the second! Infinitely rainier than the first!

It gave everybody's coming-down-stairs expression a curiously comical twist as though Dame Nature herself had been caught off-guard somehow in a moment of dishabille that though inexpressibly funny, couldn't exactly be referred to — not among mere casual acquaintances—not so early in the morning, anyway!

Yet even though everybody rushed at once to the fireplace instead of to the breakfast-table nobody held us responsible for the weather. Everyone in fact seemed to make rather an extra effort to assure us that he or she—as the case might be, most distinctly did *not* hold us responsible.

Paul Brenswick indeed grew almost eloquent telling us about an accident to the weather which he himself had witnessed in a climate as supposedly well-regulated as the climate of South Eastern Somewhere was supposed to be! Ann Woltor raked her cheerier memories for the story of a four days' rain-storm which she had experienced once in a very trying visit to her great aunt somebody-or-other on some peculiarly stormbound section of the Welsh coast. George Keet's chivalrous anxiety to set us at our ease was truly heroic.

He even improvised a parody about it: "Rain," observed George Keets, "makes strange umbrella-mates!" A leak had developed during the night it seemed in the ceiling directly over his bed—and George, the finicky, the fastidious, the silk-pajamered—had been obliged to crawl out and seek shelter with Rollins and his flannel night-cap in the next room. And Rollins, it appeared, had not proved a particularly genial host.

"By the way, where is Mr. Rollins this morning?" questioned the Bride from her frowning survey of the storm-swept beach.

"Mr. Rollins," confided my Husband, "has a slight headache this morning."

"Why, that's too bad," sympathized Ann Woltor.

"No, it isn't a bad one at all," contradicted my Husband. "Just the very mildest one possible—under the circumstances. It was really very late when he got in again last night. And very wet." From under his casually lowered eyes a single glance of greeting shot out at me.

"Now, there you are again!" cried George Keets. "Flirting! You married people! Something that anyone else would turn out

as mere information,—'The Ice Man has just left two chunks of ice!' or 'Mr. Rollins has a headache'!—you go and load up with some mysterious and unfathomable significance! Glances pass! Your wife flushes!" "Mysterious?" shrugged my Husband. "Unfathomable? Why it's clear as crystal. The madam says, 'Let there be a headache—and there *is* a headache!"

As Allan John joined the group at the fireplace everybody began talking weather again. From the chuckle of the birch-logs to the splash on the window-pane the little groups shifted and changed. Everybody seemed to be waiting for something. On the neglected breakfast table even the gay upstanding hemispheres of grapefruit rolled over on their beds of ice to take another nap.

In a great flutter of white and laughter the May Girl herself came prancing over the threshold. It wasn't just the fact of being in white that made her look so astonishingly festal; she was almost always in white. Not yet the fact of laughter. Taken all in all I think she was the most radiantly laughing youngster that I have ever known. But most astonishingly festal she certainly looked, nev-

ertheless. Maybe it was the specially new and chic little twist which she had given her hair. Maybe it was the absurdly coquettish dab of black court-plaster which she had affixed to one dimply cheek.

"Oh, if I'm going to be engaged to-day to a real artist," she laughed, "I've certainly got to take some extra pains with my personal appearance. Why, I've hardly slept all night," she confided ingenuously, "I was so excited!"

"Yes, won't it be interesting," whispered the Bride to George Keets, "to see what Mr. Kennilworth will really do? He's so awfully temperamental! And so — so inexcusably beautiful. Whatever he does is pretty sure to be interesting. Now up-stairs—all day yesterday—wouldn't it——?"

"Yes, wouldn't it be interesting," glowed Ann Woltor quite unexpectedly, "if he'd made her something really wonderful? Something that would last, I mean, after the game was over? Even just a toy, something that would outlast Time itself. Something that even when she was old she could point to and say, 'Claude Kennilworth made that for me when—we were young.'"

"Why, Ann Woltor!" I stammered. "Do you feel that way about him? Does—does he make you feel that way, too?"

"I think—he would make—anyone feel that way—too," intercepted Allan John quite amazingly. In three days surely it was the only voluntary statement he had made, and everybody turned suddenly to stare at him. But it was only too evident from the persistent haggardness of his expression that he had no slightest intention in the world of pursuing his unexpected volubility.

"And it isn't just his good looks either!" resumed the Bride as soon as she had recovered from her own astonishment at the interpolation.

"Oh, something, very different," mused Ann Woltor. "The queer little sense he gives you of—of wires humming! Whether you like him or not that queer little sense of 'wires humming' that all really creative people give you! As though—as though—they were being rather specially re-charged all the time from the Main Battery!"

"The 'Main Battery,'" puzzled the Bridegroom, "being——?"

"Why—God, of course!" said the Bride with a vague sort of surprise.

"When women talk mechanics and religion in the same breath," laughed the Bridegroom, "it certainly——"

"I was talking neither mechanics nor religion," affirmed the Bride, with the faintest possible tinge of asperity.

"Oh, of course, anyone can see," admitted the Bridegroom, "that Kennilworth is a clever chap."

"Clever as the deuce!" acquiesced George Keets.

With an impatient tap of her foot the May Girl turned suddenly back from the window.

"Yes! But where *is* he?" she laughed.

"That's what I say!" cried my Husband. "We've waited quite long enough for him!"

"Dallying up-stairs probably to put a dab of black court-plaster on *his* cheek!" observed George Keets drily.

With one accord everybody but the May Girl rushed impulsively to the breakfast table.

"Seems as though—somebody ought to wait," dimpled the May Girl.

"Oh, nonsense!" asserted everybody.

A little bit reluctantly she came at last to her place. Her face was faintly troubled.

"On—on an engagement morning," she persisted. "it certainly seems as though—somebody ought to wait."

In the hallway just outside a light step sounded suddenly. It was really astonishing with what an air of real excitement and expectancy everybody glanced up.

But the step in the hall proved only the step of a maid.

"The young gentleman upstairs sent a message," said the maid. "Most particular he was that I give it exact. 'It being so rainy again,' he says, 'and there not being anything specially interesting on the—the docket as far as he knows, he'll stay in bed—thank you.'"

For an instant it seemed as though everybody at the table except Allan John jerked back from his plate with a knife, fork or spoon, brandished half-way in mid air. There was no jerk left in Allan John, I imagine. It was Allan John's color that changed. A dull flush of red where once just gray shadows had lain.

"So he'll stay in bed, thank you," repeated the maid sing-songishly.

"*What?*" gasped my Husband.

"W-w-what?" stammered the May Girl.

"Well—of all the—nerve!" muttered Paul Brenswick.

"Why—why how extraordinary," murmured Ann Woltor.

"*There's* your 'artistic temperament' for you, all right!" laughed the Bride a bit hectically. "Peeved is it because he thought Miss Davies——?"

"Don't you think you're just a bit behind the times in your interpretation of the phrase 'artistic temperament'?" interrupted George Keets abruptly. "Except in special neurasthenic cases it is no longer the fashion I believe to lay bad manners to the artistic temperament itself but rather to the humble environment from which most artistic temperaments are supposed to have sprung."

"Eh? What's that?" laughed the Bride.

Very deliberately George Keets lit a fresh cigarette. "No one person, you know, can have everything," he observed with the thinnest of all his thin-lipped smiles. "Three generations of plowing, isn't it, to raise one

artist? Oh, Mr. Kennilworth's social eccentricities, I assure you, are due infinitely more to the soil than to the soul."

"Oh, can your statistics!" implored my Husband a bit sharply, "and pass Miss Davies the sugar!"

"And some coffee!" proffered Paul Brenswick.

"And this heavenly cereal!" urged the Bride.

"Oh, now I remember," winced the May Girl suddenly. "He said 'she'll wait all right' —but, of course, it does seem just a little—wee bit—f-funny! Even if you don't care a—a rap," she struggled heroically through a glint of tears. "Even if you don't care a rap—sometimes it's just a little bit hard to say a word like f-funny!"

"Damned hard," agreed my Husband and Paul Brenswick and George Keets all in a single breath.

The subsequent conversation fortunately was not limited altogether to expletives. Never, I'm sure, have I entertained a more vivacious not to say hilarious company at breakfast. Nobody seemed contented just to keep dimples in the May Girl's face. Everybody insisted

upon giggles. The men indeed treated themselves to what is usually described as "wild guffaws."

Personally I think it was a mistake. It brought Rollins down-stairs just as everybody was leaving the table in what had up to that moment been considered perfectly reestablished and invulnerable glee. Everybody, of course, except poor Allan John. No one naturally would expect any kind of glee from Allan John.

In the soft pussy-footed flop of his felt slippers none of us heard Rollins coming. But I—I saw him! And such a Rollins! Stripped of the single significant facial expression of his life which I had surprised so unexpectedly in his eyes the night before, Rollins would certainly never be anything but just Rollins! Heavily swathed in his old plaid ulster with a wet towel bound around his brow he loomed cautiously on the scene bearing an empty coffee cup, and from the faintly shadowing delicacy of the parted portières affirmed with one breath how astonished he was to find us still at breakfast, while with the next he confided equally fatuously, "I thought I heard merry voices!"

It was on Claude Kennilworth's absence, of course, that his maddening little mind fixed itself instantly with unalterable concentration.

"What ho! the — engagement?" he demanded abruptly.

"There isn't any engagement," said my Husband with a somewhat vicious stab at the fire.

From his snug, speculative scrutiny of the storm outside, George Keets swung round with what quite evidently was intended to be a warning frown.

"Mr. Kennilworth has—defaulted," he murmured.

"Defaulted?" grinned Rollins. Then with perfectly unprecedented perspicacity his roving glance snatched up suddenly the unmistakable tremor of the May Girl's chin. "Oh, what nonsense!" he said. "There are plenty of other eligible men in the party!"

"Oh, but you see—there are not!" laughed Paul Brenswick. "Mr. Delville and I are married—and our wives won't let us."

"Oh, nonsense!" grinned Rollins. Once again his roving glance swept the company.

Everybody saw what was coming, turned

hot, turned cold, shut his eyes, opened them again,—but was powerless to avert.

"Why, what's the matter with trying Allan John?" grinned Rollins.

The thing was inexcusable! Brutal! Blundering! Absolutely doltish beyond even Rollins's established methods of doltishness. But at last when everybody turned inadvertently to scan poor Allan John's face—there was no Allan John to be scanned. Somewhere through a door or a window—somehow between one blink of the eye and another—Allan John had slipped from the room.

"Why—why, Mr. Rollins!" gasped everybody all at once. "Whatever in the world were you thinking of?"

"Maybe—maybe—he didn't hear it—after all!" rallied the Bride with the first real ray of hope.

"Maybe he just saw it coming," suggested the Bridegroom.

"And dodged in the nick of time," said George Keets.

"To save not only himself but ourselves," frowned my Husband, "from an almost irretrievable awkwardness."

"Why just the minute before it happened,"

deprecated Ann Woltor, "I was thinking suddenly how much better he looked, how his color had improved,—why his cheeks looked almost red."

"Yes, the top of his cheeks," said the May Girl, "were really quite red." Her own cheeks at the moment were distinctly pale. "Where do you suppose he's gone to?" she questioned. "Don't you think that—p'raps—somebody ought to go and find him?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake leave him alone!" cried Paul Brenswick.

"Leave him alone," acquiesced all the other men.

In the moment's nervous reaction and let down that ensued it was really a relief to hear George Keets cry out, with such poignant amazement from his stand at the window:

"Why what in the world is that red-roof out on the rocks?" he cried.

In the same impulse both my Husband and myself ran quickly to his side.

"Oh, that's all right!" laughed my Husband. "I thought maybe it had blown off or something. Why, that's just the 'Bungalow on the Rocks,'" he explained.

"My Husband's study and work-room," I

exemplified. "'Forbidden-Ground' is its real name! Nobody is ever allowed to go there without an invitation from—himself!"

"Why—but it wasn't there yesterday!" asserted George Keets.

"Oh, yes, it was!" laughed my Husband.

"It was not!" said George Keets.

The sheer unexpected primitiveness of the contradiction delighted us so that neither of us took the slightest offense.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, of course, George Keets recovered himself almost in an instant—that right here before our eyes—that same vivid scarlet roof was looming there yesterday against the gray rocks and sea—and none of us saw it?"

"Saw what?" called Paul Brenswick. "Where?" And came striding to the window.

"Gad!" said Paul Brenswick. "Victoria! Come here, quick!" he called.

With frank curiosity the Bride joined the group. "Why of all things!" she laughed. "Why it never in the world was there yesterday!"

A trifle self-consciously Ann Woltor joined the group. "Bungalow?" she questioned. "A Bungalow out on the rocks." Her face did

certainly look just a little bit queer. Anyone who wanted to, was perfectly free of course, to interpret the look as one of incredulity.

"No, of course not! Miss Woltor agrees with me perfectly," triumphed George Keets. "It was not there yesterday!"

"Oh, but it must have been!" dimpled the May Girl. "If Mr. and Mrs. Delville say so! It's their bungalow!"

"It—was—not there—yesterday," puzzled George Keets. More than having his honor at stake he spoke suddenly as though he thought it was his reason that was being threatened.

With her cheeks quite rosy again the May Girl began to clap her hands. Her eyes were sparkling with excitement.

"Oh, I don't care whether it was there yesterday or not!" she triumphed. "It's there to-day! Let's go and explore it! And if it's magic, so much the better! Oh, loo——loo—look!" she cried as a great roar and surge of billows broke on the rocks all around the little red roof and churned the whole sky-line into a chaos of foam. "Oh, come—*come!*" she besought everybody.

"Oh, but, my dear!" I explained, "How would you get there? No row-boat could live

in that sea! And by way of the rocky ledge there's no possible path except at the lowest tide! And besides," I reminded her, "it's named 'Forbidden Ground,' you know! Nobody is supposed to go there without——"

With all the impulsiveness of an irresponsible baby the May Girl dashed across the room and threw her arms round my neck.

"Why, you old dear," she laughed, "don't you know that that's just the reason why I want to explore it! I want to know why it's 'Forbidden Ground'! Oh, surely — surely," she coaxed, "even if it is a work-room, there couldn't be any real sin in just prying a little?"

"No, of course, no real sin," I laughed back at her earnestness. "Just an indiscretion!"

Quite abruptly the May Girl relaxed her hug, and narrowed her lovely eyes dreamily to some personal introspection.

"I've—never yet—committed a real indiscretion," she confided with apparent regret.

"Well, pray don't begin," laughed George Keets in spite of himself, "by trying to explore something that isn't there."

"And don't you and Keets," flared Paul

Brenswick quite unexpectedly, "by denying the existence of something that is there!"

"Well, if it is there to-day," argued George Keets, "it certainly wasn't there yesterday!"

"Well, if it wasn't there yesterday, it is at least there to-day!" argued Paul Brenswick.

"Rollins! Hi there—Rollins!" they both called as though in a single breath.

From his humble seat on the top stair to which he had wisely retreated at his first inkling of having so grossly outraged public opinion, Rollins's reply came wafting somewhat hopefully back.

"H—h—iii," rallied Rollins.

"That red roof on the rocks—" shouted Paul Brenswick.

"Was it there — yesterday?" demanded George Keets.

"Wait!" cackled Rollins. "Wait till I go look!" A felt footstep thudded. A window opened. The felt footstep thudded again. "No," called Rollins. "Now that I come to think of it—I don't remember having noticed a red roof there yesterday."

"Now!" laughed George Keets.

"But, oh, I say!" gasped Rollins, in what seemed to be very sudden and altogether in-

disputable confusion. "Why—why it must have been there! Because that's the shack where we've catalogued the shells every year —for the last seven years!"

"Now!" laughed Paul Brenswick.

Without another word everybody made a bolt for the hat-rack and the big oak settle, snatched up his or her oil-skin clothes—anybody's oil-skin clothes—and dashed off through the rain to the edge of the cliff to investigate the phenomenon at closer range.

Truly the thing was almost too easy to be really righteous! Just a huge rock-colored tarpaulin stripped at will from a red-tiled roof and behold, mystery looms on an otherwise drab-colored day! And a mystery at a house-party? Well—whoever may stand proven as the mother of invention—*Curiosity,* you know just as well as I do, is the father of a great many very sprightly little adventures!

Within ten minutes from the proscenium box of our big bay-window, my Husband and I could easily discern the absurd little plot and counterplots that were already being hatched.

It was the Bride and George Keets who seemed to be thinking, pointing, gesticulating, in the only perfect harmony. Even at this

distance, and swathed as they were in hastily adjusted oil-skins, a curiously academic sort of dignity stamped their every movement. Nothing but sheer intellectual determination to prove that their minds were normal would ever tempt either one of them to violate a Host's "No Trespass" sign!

Nothing academic about Paul Brenswick's figure! With one yellow elbow crooked to shield the rain from his eyes he stood estimating so many probable feet of this, so many probable feet of that. He was an engineer! Perspectives were his playthings! And if there was any new trick about perspectives that he didn't know—he was going to solve it now—no matter what it cost either him or anybody else!

More like a young colt than anything else, like a young colt running for its pasture-bars, the May Girl dashed vainly up and down the edge of the cliff. Nothing academic, nothing of an engineer—about any young colt! If the May Girl reached "the Bungalow on the Rocks" it would be just because she wanted to!

Ann Woltor's reaction was the only one that really puzzled me. Drawn back a little from

the others, sheltered transiently from the wind by a great jagged spur of gray rock but with her sombre face turned almost eagerly to the rain, she stood there watching with a perfectly inexplainable interest the long white blossomy curve of foam and spray which marked the darkly submerged ledge of rock that connected the red-tiled bungalow with the beach just below her. Ann Woltor certainly was no prankish child. Neither was it to be supposed that any particular problem of perspective had flecked her mind into the slightest uneasiness. Ann Woltor knew that the bungalow was there! Had spent at least nine hours in it on the previous day! Lunched in it! Supped in it! Proved its inherent prosiness! Yet even I was puzzled as she crept out from the shelter of her big boulder to the very edge of the cliff, and leaned away out still staring, always at that wave-tormented ledge.

From the hyacinth-scented shadows just behind me I heard a sudden little laugh.

"I'll wager you a new mink muff," said my Husband quite abruptly, "that Ann Woltor gets there first!"

CHAPTER V

IN this annual *Rainy Week* drama of ours, one of the very best parts I "double" in, is with the chambermaid, making beds!

Once having warned my guests of this occasional domestic necessity, I ought, I suppose, to feel absolutely relieved of any embarrassing sense of intrusion incidental to the task. But there is always, somehow, such an unwarrantable sense of spiritual rather than material intimacy connected with the sight of a just deserted guest-room. Particularly so, I think, in a sea-shore guest-room. A beach makes such big babies of us all!

Country-house hostesses have never mentioned it as far as I can remember. Mountains evidently do not recover for us that particular kind of lost rapture. Nor even green pine woods revive the innocent lusts of the little. But in a sea-shore guest-room, every fresh morning of the world, as long as time

lasts, you will find on bureau-top desk or table, mixed up with chiffons and rouges, crowding the tennis rackets or base balls, blurring the open sophisticate page of the latest French novel, that dear, absurd, ever-increasing little hoard of childish treasures! The round, shining pebbles, the fluted clam-shell, the wopse of dried sea-weed, a feather perhaps from a gull's wing! Things common as time itself, repetitive as sand! Yet irresistibly covetable! How do you explain it?

Who in the world, for instance, would expect to find a cunningly contrived toy-boat on Rollins's bureau with two star-fish listed as the only passengers? Or Paul Brenswick's candle thrust into a copperas-tinted knot of water-logged cedar? In the snug confines of a small cigar box on a lovely dank bed of maroon and gray sea-weed Victoria Brenswick had nested her treasure-trove. Certainly the quaint garnet necklace could hardly have found a more romantic and ship-wrecky sort of a setting. Even Allan John had started a little procession of sand-dollars across his mantelpiece. But there was no silver whistle figuring as the band, I noticed.

What would Victoria Brenswick have said,

I wondered, what would Allan John have thought if they had even so much as dreamed that these precious "ship-wreck treasures" of theirs had been purchased brand new in Boston Town within a week and "planted" most carefully by my Husband with all those other pseudo mysteries in the old trunk in the sand? But goodness me, one's got to "start" something on the first day of even the most ordinary house-party!

With so much to watch outside the window, figures still moving eagerly up and down the edge of the cliff, and so much to think about inside, all the little personal whims and fancies betrayed by the various hoards, the bed-making industry I'm afraid was somewhat slighted on this particular morning. Was my Husband still standing at that down-stairs window, I wondered, speculating about that bungalow on the rocks even as I stood at the window just above him speculating on the same subject? Why did he think that Ann Woltor would be the one to get there first? What had Ann Woltor left there the day before that made her specially anxious to get there first? Truly this *Rainy Week* experiment develops some rather unique puzzles.

Maybe if I tried, I thought, I could add a little puzzle of my own invention! Just for sheer restiveness I turned and made another round of the guest-rooms. Now that I remembered it there was a bit more sand oozing from the Bride's necklace box to the mahogany bureau-top than was really necessary.

The rest of the morning passed without special interest. But the luncheon hour developed a most extraordinary interest in the principles of physical geography which beginning with all sorts of valuable observations concerning the weight of the atmosphere or the conformation of mountains or the law of tides, ended invariably with the one direct question: "At just what hour this evening, for instance, will the tide be lo wagain?"

My Husband was almost beside himself with concealed delight.

"Oh, but you don't think for a moment, do you—" I implored him in a single whisper of privacy snatched behind the refilling of the coffee urn. "You don't think for a moment that anybody would be rash enough to try and make the trip in the big dory?"

"Well—hardly," laughed my Husband. "If you'd seen where I've hidden the oars!"

The oars apparently were not the only things hidden at the moment from mortal ken. Claude Kennilworth and Ego still persisted quite brutally in withholding their charms from us. Rollins had retreated to the sacristy of his own room to complete his convalescence. And even Allan John seemed to have wandered for the time being beyond the call of either voice or luncheon bell. Allan John's deflection worried the May Girl a little I think, but not unduly. It didn't worry the men at all.

"When a chap wants to be alone—he wants to be alone!" explained Paul Brenswick with unassailable conciseness.

"It's a darned good sign," agreed my Husband, "that he's ready to be alone! It's the first time, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's all right, of course," conceded the May Girl amiably, "if you're quite sure that he was dressed right for it."

"Maybe a hike on the beach at just this moment, whether he's dressed right for it or not," asserted George Keets, "is just the one thing the poor devil needs to sweep the last cobweb out of his brain."

"I agree with you perfectly," said Victoria Brenswick.

It was really astonishing in a single morning how many things George Keets and the Bride had discovered that they agreed on perfectly. It teased the Bridegroom a little I think. But anyone could have seen that it actually puzzled the Bride. And women, when they are puzzled, I've noticed, are pretty apt to insist upon tracing the puzzle to its source. So that when George Keets suggested a further exploration of the dunes as the most plausible diversion for the afternoon, it wouldn't have surprised me at all if Victoria Brenswick had not only acquiesced in the suggestion for herself and her Bridegroom but exacted its immediate fulfillment. She did not, however. Quite peremptorily, in fact, she announced instead her own and her Bridegroom's unalterable intent to remain at home in the big warm library by the apple-wood fire.

It was the May Girl who insisted on forging forth alone with George Keets into the storm.

"Why, I shall perish," dimpled the May Girl, "if I don't get some more exercise to-day! —Weather like this—why—why it's so glorious!" she thrilled. "So maddeningly glorious! —I—I wish I was a seagull so I could breast right off into the foam and blast of it! I

wish—I wish——!" But what page is long enough to record the wishes of Eighteen?

My Husband evidently had no wish in the world except to pursue the cataloging of shells in Rollins's crafty company.

Ann Woltor confessed quite frankly that her whole human interest in the afternoon centred solely on the matter of sleep.

Hyacinths, of course, are my own unfailing diversion.

Tracking me just a little bit self-consciously to my hyacinth lair, the Bride seemed rather inclined to dally a moment, I noticed, before returning to her Bridegroom and the library fire. Her eyes were very interesting. What bride's are not? Particularly that Bride whose intellect parallels even her emotions.

"Maybe," she essayed quite abruptly, "Maybe it was a trifle funny of me not to tramp this afternoon. But the bridge-building work begins again next week, you know. It's pretty strenuous, everybody says. Men come home very tired from it. Not specially sociable. So I just made up my mind," she said, in a voice that though playfully lowered was yet rather curiously intense. "So I just made up my mind that I would stay at home

this afternoon and get acquainted with my Husband." Half-proud, half-shamed, her puzzled eyes lifted to mine. "Because it's dawned on me very suddenly," she laughed, "that I don't know my Husband's opinion on one solitary subject in the world except — just me!" With a rather amusing little flush she stooped down and smothered her face in a pot of blue hyacinths. "Oh—hyacinths!" she murmured. "And May rain! The smell of them! Will I ever forget the fragrance of this week—while Time lasts?" But the eyes that lifted to mine again were still puzzled. "Now—that Mr. Keets," she faltered. "Why in just an hour or two this morning, why in just the little time that luncheon takes, I know his religion and his Mother's first name. I know his philosophies, and just why he adores Ruskin and disagrees with Bernard Shaw. I know where he usually stays when he's in Amsterdam and just what hotel we both like best in Paris. Why I know even where he buys his boots, and why. And I buy mine at the same place and for just exactly the same reason. But my Husband." Quite in spite of herself a little laugh slipped from her lips. "Why—I don't even know how my Husband votes!"

she gasped. In some magic, excitative flash of memory her breath began to quicken. "It—It was at college, you know, that we met—Paul and I," she explained. "At a dance the night before my graduation." Once again her face flamed like a rose. "Why, we were engaged, you know, within a week! And then Paul went to China!—Oh, of course, we wrote," she said, "and almost every day, too. But—."

"But lovers, of course, don't write a great deal about buying boots," I acquiesced, "nor even so specially much about Ruskin nor even their mothers."

In the square of the library doorway a man's figure loomed a bit suddenly.

"Vic! Aren't you ever coming?" fretted her impatient Bridegroom.

Like a homing bird she turned and sped to her mate!

Yet an hour later, when I passed the library door, I saw Paul Brenswick lying fast asleep in the depth of his big leather chair. Fire wasted—books neglected—Chance itself forgotten or ignored! But the Bride was nowhere to be seen.

I was quite right though when I thought that I should find her in her room. Just as I

expected, too, she was standing by the window staring somewhat blankly out at the Dunes.

But the eyes that she lifted to me this time were not merely puzzled—they were suffering. If Paul Brenswick could have seen his beloved at this moment and even so much as hoped that there was a God, he would have gone down on his knees then and there and prayed that for Love's sake the very real shock which he had just given her would end in laughter rather than tears. Yet her speech, when it came at last, was perfectly casual.

"He—he wouldn't talk," she said.

"Couldn't, you mean!" I contradicted her quite sharply. "Husbands can't, you know! Marriage seems to do something queer to their vocal chords."

"Your husband talks," smiled the Bride very faintly.

"Oh—beautifully," I admitted. "But not to me! It doesn't seem to be quite compatible with established romance somehow, this talking business, between husbands and wives."

"Romance?" rallied the Bride. "Would you call Mr. Delville ex—exactly romantic?"

"Oh—very!" I boasted. "But not conversationally."

"But I wanted to talk," said the Bride, very slowly.

"Why, of course, you did, you dear darling!" I cried out impulsively. "Most brides do! You wanted to discuss and decide in about thirty minutes every imaginable issue that is yet to develop in all the long glad years you hope to have together! The friends you are going to build. Why you haven't even glimpsed a child's picture in a magazine, this the first week of your marriage, without staying awake half the night to wonder what your children's children's names will be."

"How do you know?" asked the Bride, a bit incisively.

"Because once I was a Bride myself," I said. "But this Paul of yours," I insisted. "This Paul of yours, you see, hasn't finished wondering yet about just you——!"

"For Heaven's sake," called my own husband through the half open doorway, "what's all this pow-wow about?"

"About husbands," I answered, quite frankly. "An argument in fact as to whether taken all in all a husband is ever very specially amusing to talk to."

"Amusing to talk to?" hooted my Husband.

"Never! Then most that any poor husband can hope for is to prove amusing to talk about!"

"Who said 'Paul'?" called that young person himself from the further shadows of the hallway.

"No one has," I laughed, "for as much as two minutes."

A trifle flushed from his nap, and most becomingly dishevelled as to hair, the Bridegroom stepped into the light. I heard his Bride give a little sharp catch of her breath.

"I—I think I must have been asleep," said the Bridegroom.

Twice the Bride swallowed very hard before she spoke.

"I—I think you must have, you rascal!" she said. It was a real victory!

Really my Husband and I would have been banged in the door if we hadn't jumped out as fast as we did!

George Keets and the May Girl came in from their walk just before supper. Judging from their personal appearances it had at least been a long walk if not a serene one. George Keets indeed seemed quite unnecessarily intent in the vestibule on taking the May Girl

to task for what he evidently considered her somewhat careless method of storing away her afternoon's accumulation of pebble and shell. Every accent of his voice, every carefully enunciated syllable reminded me only too absurdly of what the May Girl had confided to me about "boys always trying to make her feel small." He was urging her now, I inferred, to stop and sort out her specimens according to some careful cotton-batting plan which he suggested.

"Whatever is worth doing at all, you know, Miss Davies," he said, "is worth doing well."

The May Girl's voice sounded very tired, not irritable, but very tired.

"Oh, if there's anything in the world that I hate," I heard her cry out, "it's that proverb! What people really mean by it," she protested, "is, 'Whatever's worth doing at all is worth doing *Swell.* And it isn't either! I tell you I like simple things best! All I ever want to do with my shells tonight is just to chuck 'em behind the door!"

Truly if Claude Kennilworth hadn't turned up for supper all in white flannels and looking like a young god, I don't know just what

I should have done. Everybody seemed either so tired or so distrait.

The tide would be low at ten o'clock. It was eight when we sat down to supper.

Ann Woltor I'm sure never took her eyes from the clock.

But to be perfectly frank everybody else at the table except the May Girl seemed to be diverting such attention as he or she retained to the personal appearance of Claude Kennilworth. Truly it wasn't right that anyone who had been so hateful all day long should be able to look so perfectly glorious in the evening.

"Where did you get the suit?" said Rollins. "Is it your own?"

"And the 'permanent wave'?" questioned the Bride. "I think you and the ocean must patronize the same hair dresser."

"Dark men always do look so fine in white flannels," whispered Ann Woltor to my Husband.

"Personally," beamed Paul Brenswick, "you look to me like a person who had imported his own Turkish bath."

"Turkish?" scoffed George Keets. "Nobody works up a shine like that by being

washed only in one language! Russian, too, it must be! Flemish——"

"Flemish are rabbits," observed the May Girl gravely. But even with this observation she did not lift her eyes from her plate. Whether she was consciously and determiningly ignoring Claude Kennilworth's only too palpable efforts to impress her with the fact that now at last he was ready to forgive her and subjugate her, or whether she really hadn't noticed him, I couldn't quite make out. And then quite suddenly at the end of her first course she put down her knife and fork and folded her hands in her lap. "Where is Allan John?" she demanded.

"Why, yes, that's so! Where is Allan John?" questioned everybody all at once.

"Some walk he's taking," reflected Paul Brenswick.

"Not too long I hope," worried my Husband very faintly.

"Hang it all, I do like that lad," acknowledged George Keets.

"Who wouldn't?" said Young Kennilworth.

"Yes, but why?" demanded Keets.

"It's his eyes," said the Bride.

"Eyes nothing!" scoffed young Kennil-

worth. "It's the way he came out of his fuss without fussing! To make a fool of yourself but never a fuss—that's my idea of a fellow being a good sport!"

"It was his tragedy that I was thinking of," said George Keets very quietly.

"Yes, where in the world," questioned my Husband with quite unwonted emotion, "would you have found another chap in the same harrowing circumstances, even among your own friends, I mean, a chum, a pal, who could have dropped in here the way he has, without putting a damper on everything? Not intentionally, of course, but just in the inevitable human nature of things. But I don't get the slightest sense somehow of Allan John being a damper!"

"'Damper?'" said the Bride. "Why he's like a sick man basking in the sun. Hasn't a word to say himself, not a single prance in his own feet. But I'd as soon think of shutting out the sun from a sick man as shutting out a laugh from Allan John. Why, Allan John needs us!" attested the Bride, "and Allan John knows that he needs us!"

With a sideways glance at the vacant chair

George Keets's thin lips parted into a really sweet smile.

"Where in creation is the boy?" he insisted. "Frankly I think we rather need him."

"All of which being the case," conceded my Husband, "it behooves me even once more, I should say, to tell Allan John that the next time he speaks about 'moving on' I shall hide his clothes. Certainly I haven't trusted him yet with even a quarter. He's so extraordinarily fussy about thinking that he ought to clear out."

It was just at that moment that the telephone rang. I decided to answer it myself, for some reason, from the instrument upstairs in my own room, rather than from the library. A minute's delay, and I held the transmitter to my lips.

"Yes," I called.

"Is this Mrs. Jack Delville?" queried the voice.

"Yes. Who's speaking?"

"It's Allan John," said the voice.

"Why, Allan John!" I laughed. "Of course it would be you! We were just speaking about you, and that's always the funny way that

things happen. But wherever in the world are you? We'd begun to worry a bit!"

"I'm in town," said Allan John.

"In town," I cried. "Town! How did you get there?"

In Allan John's voice suddenly it was as though tone itself was fashion. "That's what I want to tell you," said Allan John. "I've done a horrid thing, a regular kid college-boy sort of thing. I've taken something from your house, that silver salt cellar you know that I forgot to give back, and left it with a man in the village as security for the price of a railroad ticket to town, and a telegram to my brother and this phone message. I didn't have a cent you know. But the instant I hear from my brother——"

"Why, you silly!" I cried. "Why didn't you speak to my Husband?"

"Oh, your Husband," said Allan John, just a bit drily, "would have given me the whole house. But he wouldn't let me leave it! And it was quite time I was leaving," the voice quickened sharply. "I had to leave some time you know. And all of a sudden I—I had to leave at once! Rollins, you know! His break about the little girl. After young Kennil-

worth's cubbishness I simply couldn't put another slight on that lovely little girl. But—" His voice was all gray and again spent, like ashes. "But I just couldn't play," he said. "Not that!"

"Why of course you couldn't play," I cried. "Nobody expected you to! Rollins is a—a horror!"

"Oh, Rollins is all right enough," said Allan John. "It's life that is the horror."

"Yes, but Allan John—!" I parried.

"You people have been angels to me," he interrupted me sharply. "I shall never forget it. Nor the lovely little girl. I'm going back to Montana to see how my ranch looks. I can't talk now. Not to anybody. For God's sake don't call anybody. But if I get straightened out again, ever, you'll hear from me. And if I don't——"

"But, Allan John," I protested. "Everybody will be desolated, your going off like this! Why, you're not even equipped in the simplest way! Not a single bit of baggage! Not a personal possession!"

Across the buzzing wires it seemed suddenly as though I could actually hear Allan John

making one last really desperate effort to smile.

"I've got my little silver whistle," said Allan John. As though in confirmation of the fact he lifted the silver bauble to his lips and blew a single flutey note across the sixty miles.

"Goodbye!" he said.

Before I had fairly dropped the receiver back into its place, the May Girl was at my elbow. Her lovely childish eyes were strangely alert, her radiant head cocked ever so slightly to one side as though she held a shell to her listening ear. But there was no shell in her hand.

"What was that?" cried the May Girl. "I thought I heard Allan John's whistle!"

CHAPTER VI

WERE you ever in a theatre, right in the middle of a play, on the very verge of an act that you were really quite curious about, and just as the curtain started to go up it was suddenly yanked down again instead, and a woman behind the scenes screamed—oh, horridly, and a man came rushing out in front of the curtain waving his arms and trying to tell everybody something, but everybody all of a sudden was so busy screaming for himself that even God, I think, couldn't have made you hear just what the trouble was?

It isn't a pleasant thing to have happen.

But that is almost exactly what happened to our *Rainy Week* play on this the fourth night of events just as I was waiting for the curtain to rise on the most carefully staged scene which we had prepared, the scene designated as *"The Bungalow on the Rocks."*

And the woman who screamed was the May

Girl. And the man who came rushing back to try and explain was Rollins. And the May Girl it proved was screaming because she was drowning! And if it hadn't been for the silly little Pom dog that Claude Kennilworth had been silly enough to bring way from New York "for a week's outing at the sea shore" just to please the extraordinarily silly girl who occupied the studio next to his, the May Girl would have drowned! It makes one feel almost afraid to move, somehow, or even not to move, for that matter, afraid to be silly indeed, or even not to be silly, lest it foil or foul in some bungling way the plot of life which the Biggest Dramatist of All had really intended.

It was Ann Woltor who gave the only adequate explanation.

Everybody had at least pretended that night the unalterable intention of going to bed early.

Claude Kennilworth of course having absented himself from the breakfast table didn't know anything about the bungalow discussion. But pique alone at the May Girl's persistent yet totally unexcited rebuff of his patronage had retired him earlier than anyone to the seclusion of his own room. And

Rollins's unhappy propensity of always and forever butting into other people's plans had been most efficiently thwarted, as far as we could see, by dragging him upstairs and slamming his nose into a brand new and very profusely illustrated tome on the subject of "The Violet Snail."

By half past ten, Ann Woltor confessed she had found the whole lower part of the house apparently deserted.

For the same reason, best known even yet only to herself, she was still very anxious it appeared to get to the bungalow before any of her house-companions should have forestalled her. The trip, I judged, had not proved unduly hard. By the aid of a pocket flashlight she had made the descent of the cliff without accident, and after a single confusion where a blind trail ended in the water discovered the jagged path that twisted along the ledge to the very door of the bungalow. Once in the bungalow she had dallied only long enough to search out by the aid of the flashlight the particular object or objects which she had come for. Startled by a little sound, the sound of a man humming a little French tune that she hadn't heard for fifteen years,

she had grabbed up her treasure, whatever it was, and bolted precipitously for the house, not knowing she had sprung the trap of our concealed phonograph when she opened the door. Even once back in the safe precincts of the house, however, she was further startled and completely upset by running into the May Girl.

The May Girl was on the stairs, it seemed, just coming down. And she didn't look "quite right," Ann Woltor admitted. That is, she looked almost as though she was walking in her sleep, or a bit dazed, a bit bewildered, and certainly, dressed as she was, just a filmy night-gown with her warm blanket wrapper merely lashed across her shoulders by its sleeves, her pretty feet bare, her gauzy hair floating like an aura all around her, it certainly wasn't to be supposed that she was just starting off on a prankish endeavor to solve the bungalow mystery. Even her eyes looked unreal to Ann Woltor. Even her voice, when she spoke, sounded more than a little bit queer.

"I—I thought I heard Allan John whistle" she said. "I—I promised, you know, that if he ever needed me I'd come."

Ann Woltor nearly collapsed. "Nonsense!" she explained. "Allan John is in town! Don't you remember? He telephoned while we were at supper. Mrs. Delville delivered his messages and good-byes to us."

"Why, yes, of course!" roused the May Girl, almost instantly. "How silly!—I guess I must have been asleep! And just dreamed it!"

"Why, of course, you were asleep and just dreamed it." Ann Woltor assured her. "You're asleep now! Get back to bed before you catch your death of cold! Or before anybody sees you!"

Ann Woltor, on the verge of hysterics herself, quite naturally was not at all anxious that those dazed, bewildered eyes should clear suddenly and with inevitable questioning upon her own distinctly drenched and most windblown and generally dishevelled appearance.

A single little shove of the shoulders had proved enough to herd the May Girl back to her bed-room while she herself had escaped undetected to her own quarters.

But the May Girl had *not* been satisfied, it appeared, with Ann Woltor's assurances concerning Allan John.

An hour or more later, roused once again to a still somewhat dazed but now unalterable conviction that Allan John had whistled, and fully equipped this time to combat whatever opposition or weather she might meet, she crept from the house out into the storm with the little Pom dog sniffing at her heels. Just what happened afterwards nobody knows. Just how it happened or exactly when it happened, nobody can even guess. Maybe it was the brilliantly lighted bungalow my Husband had fixed for the setting of the "Bungalow Scene" just after Ann Woltor's surreptitious visit that incited her. Maybe to a mind already stricken with feverishness the rising tide did suck through the bungalow rocks with a sound that faintly suggested a rather specially agonized sort of whistle. Who can say? The fact remains that to all intents and purposes she seemed to have ignored the ledge that even yet, in spite of its drenching spray, would have been perfectly safe for another half hour at least, and plunged forth down the blind trail, off the rocks into the water below. Resolutely she refused to cry for help. Perhaps the shock of the cold water chilled the cry in her throat. She grasped the

slippery seaweed clinging to the rocks—moaning a little—crying a little—the pitiful struggle setting the Pom dog nearly crazy. How long she clung there she couldn't tell. She was mauled and bruised by the threshing waves. Still some complex inhibition prevented her crying out for help. Ages passed, her bruised arms and numb fingers refused to hold the grip on the elusive seaweed forever and she eventually let go her hold. A receding wave took her and tossed her poor exhausted body still struggling against another ledge of rock well out of reach from shore. Then, for the first time, the May Girl seemed to realize fully her peril—and she shrieked for help.

Ann Woltor, rousing sluggishly from her sleep, heard the black Pom dog barking furiously on the beach. Reluctant at first to leave her snug bed it must have been several minutes at least before sheer curiosity and irritation drove her to get up and peer from the window.

Out of that murky blackness of course not a single outline of the little dog met her sight. Just that incessant yap-yap-yap-yap of a tiny creature almost frenzied with excitement. But what really smote Ann Woltor's

startled vision, and for the first time, was the flare of lights, which made the bungalow seem as if ablaze. And as she stared aghast into that flare of light which seemed to point so accusingly at her across the intervening waters, she either sensed or saw—the May Girl's unmistakable head and shoulders banging into the single craggy rock that still jutted up from the depths—saw an arm reach out—heard that one blood-curdling scream!

Rollins must have thought she was mad! Dragging him from his bed, with her arms around his neck, her lips crushed to his ear,—even then she could hardly articulate or make a sound louder than a whisper.

Rollins fortunately did not lose his voice. Rollins bellowed. Rushing out into the hall just as he was, pajamas, nightcap and all, Rollins lifted his voice like a baying hound.

In a moment all hands were on deck. My Husband rushed for the dory—George Keets with him, Paul Brenswick, Kennilworth, Rollins!

The women huddled on the beach.

"Hold on! Hold on!" we shouted into space. "Just a minute more!—Just one minute more!"

We might just as well have shouted into a saw-dust pile.—The wind took the words and rammed them down our throats again till we sickened and choked!

Young Kennilworth came running. He was still in his white flannels. He looked like a ghost.

"There's been some hitch about the oars!" he cried. "Is she still there?"

In the flare of our lantern light I turned suddenly and stared at him. He looked so queer. In a moment so awful, it seemed almost incredible that any human face could have summoned so much EGO into it. From those gay, pleasure-roaming feet, it must have come hurtling suddenly — that expression! From those facile self-assured finger tips that were already coaxing the secrets of line and form from the Creator!—From that lusty, hot-blooded young heart that was even now accumulating its "Pasts!"—From the arrogant, brilliant young brain that knew only too well that it had a "FUTURE!"—And even as I watched, young Kennilworth stripped the white flannels from his body. And the pleasure. And the triumph. And all the little pasts. And all the one big future. And he

who had come so presumptuously to us to make an infinitesimal bronze replica of the sea—went forth very humbly from us to make a man-sized model of sacrifice.

For an instant only as he steadied for the plunge a flash of the old mockery crossed his face.

"Of course I'm stronger than the ocean," he called back. "But if it shouldn't prove so —don't forget my Old Man's birthday!"

Ann Woltor fainted as his slim body struck the waves.

Hours passed—ages, æons—before the dory reached them! Yet my husband says that it way only minutes. By the merciful providence of darkness we were at least spared some of the visual stages of that struggle. Minutes or æons—there were not even seconds to spare, it proved by the time help actually arrived. Claude Kennilworth had a broken arm, but was at least conscious. The May Girl looked as though she would never be conscious again. Against the ghastly pallor of her skin the brutal bruises loomed like love's last offering of violets. The flexible finger-tips had clawed themselves to pulp and blood.

The village doctor came on the wings of the wind! We telephoned Dr. Brawne, but he was away on a business trip somewhere and could not be located! The rest of the night went by like a brand-new battle for life, but in the full glare of lamp-light this time! By breakfast-time, if one can compute hours so on a morning when nobody eats, Claude Kennilworth was almost himself again. But the May Girl's vitality failed utterly to rally. White as the linen that encompassed her she lay in that dreadful stupor among her pillows. Only once she roused herself to any attempt at speech and even then her words were almost inaudible. "Allan John," she struggled to say. "Was trying——to find him."

"Has she had any shock before this?" puzzled the Doctor. "Any recent calamity? Any special threat of impending illness?"

"She fainted day before yesterday," was all the information anybody could proffer. "She is subject to fainting spells, it seems. Last night Miss Woltor thought she looked a little bit dazed as though with a touch of fever."

"We've got to rouse her some way," said the Doctor.

"Oh, if we could only find Allan John,"

cried the Bride. "Allan John — and his whistle," she supplemented with almost shamefaced playfulness.

My Husband and George Keets tore off to town in the little car! They raked the streets, the hotels, the telegraph offices, the railroad station, God knows what before they found him. But they did find him. That's all that really matters!

It was ten o'clock at night before they all reached home again. Allan John asked only one question as he crossed the threshold. His forehead was puckered with perplexity.

"Is — everybody — in the world going to die?" he said.

They took him directly to the May Girl's room and put him down in a chair just opposite her bed, with the whistle in his hands. "Spring and Youth and the Pipes of Pan!" But such a sorry Pan! All the youth that was left in him seemed to have been wrung out anew by this latest horror. In the grayness of him, the hopelessness, the pain, he might have been fifty, sixty, himself, instead of the scant twenty-eight or thirty years that he doubtless was. A little bit shakily he lifted the whistle to his lips.

"Not that I put a great deal of credence in it," admitted the Doctor. "But if you say it was a sound—a signal that she had been waiting for——"

Softly Allan John fluted the silver note.

A little shiver—a struggle, passed across the figure on the bed.

"Again!" prompted the Doctor.

Once more Allan John lifted the whistle to his lips.

The May Girl opened her eyes and struggled vainly to raise herself on her elbow. When she saw Allan John a vague sort of astonishment flushed across her face and an odd apologetic little laugh slipped weakly from her lips.

"I—I came just as soon as I could, Allan John," she said, and sinking back into her pillows began quite unexpectedly to cry. It was the Doctor himself who sat by her side and wiped her tears away.

Ann Woltor shared the watches with me through the rest of the night. Allan John never left the room. Towards dawn I sent even Ann Woltor to her sleep and Allan John and I met the new day alone. By the time it was really light the May Girl, weak as she was,

seemed to have recovered a certain amount of talkativeness. Recognizing thoroughly the presence and activity of both my hands and my feet, she seemed to ignore entirely the existence of either my eyes or my ears. Her puzzled wonderments were directed at Allan John alone.

"Allan John—Allan John," I heard her call softly.

"Yes," said Allan John.

"It's a lie," said the May Girl, "what people say about drowning, that as you go down you remember every little teeny weeny thing that has ever happened to you in your life! All your past, I mean! All the dreadful—wicked things that you've ever done! Oh, it's an awful lie!"

"Is it?" said Allan John.

"Yes, it certainly is;" attested the May Girl. "Why, I never even remembered the day I bit my grandmother."

"N—o," shivered Allan John.

"No, indeed!" insisted the May Girl. "The only things that I thought of were the things I had planned to do! — The — The — PLANS that were drowning with me! One of them," she flushed suddenly, "one of the plans I

mean—I didn't seem to care at all when I saw it go down—and the plan about going to Europe some time. Oh, I don't think that suffered so terribly. But the farm. The farm I was planning to have. The cows. The horses. The dogs. The chickens. The rabbits. Why, Allan John, I counted seventeen rabbits!" Very softly to herself she began to cry again.

"S—s—h. S—s—h," cautioned Allan John. "Things that have never happened you know can't die."

"Of that," reflected the May Girl through her tears, "I am—not so—perfectly sure. Is —is it going to clear up?" she asked quite irrelevantly.

"Oh, yes, *surely!*" rallied Allan John. He He would have told her it was Chirstmas I think if he had really thought that that was what she wanted him to say. Very expeditiously instead he began to shine up the silver whistle with the corner of his handkerchief.

With an almost amusing solemnity the May Girl lay and watched the proceeding. Under the heavy fringe of her lashes her eyes looked very shy. Then so gently, so childishly, that even Allan John didn't wince till it was all

over, she asked him the question that no other person in the world probably could have asked him at that moment, and lived.

"Allan John," she asked, "do you suppose that you will ever marry again?"

"Oh, my God, no!" gasped Allan John.

"Men—do," mused the May Girl.

"Men do," conceded Allan John. With the sweat starting on his brow he jumped up and strode to the window. From the window he turned back slowly with a curious look of perplexity on his face. "Why—do you ask—that?" he said.

"Oh, I don't know!" said the May Girl. "I was just wondering," she sighed.

"Wondering what?" said Allan John.

"Wondering," mused the May Girl, "if you would ever want to marry me."

For a moment Allan John did not seem to understand—for a moment he gazed aghast at the May Girl's impassive face. "Why—child," he stammered.

"Why Honey-Dear," I intercepted wildly.

It was the strangest wooing I ever saw or dreamed of. The wooing by a person who didn't even know she was wooing—of a person who didn't even know he was being wooed.

"Well—all right—perhaps it doesn't matter," said the May Girl. "I was only thinking how sad it would be — if Allan John ever did need me for his wife and I was already married to somebody else."

When the Doctor came at noon he reported with eminent satisfaction a decided improvement in both his patients. Claude Kennilworth, contrary to one's natural expectations, was proving himself an ideal patient despite his painful injury—which he steadfastly refused to acknowledge.

Even the May Girl's more subtle and mystifying complications seemed to have cleared up most astonishingly, he felt, since his previous visit.

"Oh, she's coming out all right," he assured us. "Fresh air, plenty of range, freedom from all emotional concern or distress," were the key-notes of his advice. "She's only a baby, grown woman-sized in an all too brief eighteen years," he averred.

Words, phrases, judgments, rioted only too confusedly through my mind that was already so inordinately perplexed with the whole chaotic situation.

As I said "good-bye," and turned back from

the front door, I was surprised to see both my Husband and Ann Woltor standing close beside me. The constrained expressions on their faces startled me.

"You heard what the Doctor said," I exclaimed. "You heard his exact words—'great big overgrown baby,' he said. 'Ought to be turned out to play in a sand-pile for at least two years more.' Just a baby, I protested, "And she'll be tending her own babies before the two years are over! They are planning to marry her in September you know to a man old enough to be her grandfather—almost. To Doctor Brawne," I stormed!

"To whom?" gasped Ann Woltor. Her face was suddenly livid. "To whom?"

A horrid chill went through me. "What's Doctor Brawne to you?" I asked.

"It's time you told her," interposed my Husband, quietly.

"What *is* Doctor Brawne to you?" I demanded.

"Doctor Brawne? Nothing!" cried Ann Woltor. "But the girl—the girl is my girl—my own little girl—my own big little girl."

"What!" I gasped. "What!" As though

my knees had turned to straw I sank into the nearest chair.

With the curious exultancy of a long strain finally relaxed, I saw Ann Woltor's immobile face flame suddenly with amusement.

"Did you think I was talking just weather with your husband all that first harrowing day and evening? In the car? In the bungalow? Oh, no—not weather!" she exclaimed. "Not even just the 'May Girl,' as you call her, but —everything! Your husband discovered it that first morning in the car," she annotated hurriedly. "I dropped my watch. It had a picture in it. A picture of May taken last year. Dr. Brawne sent it to me."

"Yes, but Dr. Brawne?" I puzzled.

"Oh, I knew that May was to be married," she frowned. "And to a man a good deal older than herself. Dr. Brawne wrote me that. But what he quite neglected to mention,—" once again the frown deepened, "was that the old man was himself. I like Dr. Brawne. He is a very brilliant man. But I certainly do not approve of him as my daughter's husband. There are reasons. One need not go into them now," she acknowledged. "At least they do not specially concern his age. My

daughter would hardly be happy with a boy I think. Boys do not usually like simplicity. It takes a mature man to appreciate simplicity."

"Yes, but the discovery?" I fretted. "Your own discovery?—Just when?"

"In the train of course, coming down that first night!" cried Ann Woltor. "I thought I should go mad. I thought at every station I would jump off. And then Rollins's bungling remark the next day about my tooth gave me the chance, as I supposed, to get away. Except for that awkward accident to my watch I should have gotten away. Your husband implored me for my own sake, for everyone's sake, to stop and consider. There was so much to consider. I had all my proofs with me, my letters, my papers, my marriage certificate. We went to the Bungalow. We thrashed it all out. I was still mad to get away. I had no other wish in the world except to get away! Your husband presuaded me that my duty was here—to watch my girl —to get acquainted with my girl—before I even so much as attempted meeting my other problems. I was very rattled. I left my broken watch in the bungalow! The picture

was still in it! That's why I went back! I wasn't sure even then that I would disclose my identity even to my daughter! For that reason alone I made your husband promise that he would not betray my secret even to you. If I decided to tell—all right. But I wished no such decision forced upon me!"

"Oh, Ann, Ann dear," I cried, "don't tell me any more, you've suffered enough. Just Rollins's bungling alone—the impudence of him——!"

"Rollins?—Rollins?" intercepted that pestiferous gentleman's voice suddenly. "Do I hear my name bandied by festive voices?" In another moment the Pest himself stood beside us.

My Husband is by no means a swearing man, but I distinctly heard from his unwonted lips at that moment a muttered blasphemy that would make a stevedore blush for shame.

Despite all her terrible stress and strain Ann Woltor smiled—actually smiled.

My Husband gasped. The cause of that gasp was only too evident. Once again we saw Rollins's ominous gaze fixed with unalterable intent on Ann Woltor's face. What was meant

to be an ingratiating smile quickened suddenly in his eyes.

"Truly, Miss Woltor," he said, "*tell me,* why don't you get it fixed?"

For an instant I thought Ann Woltor would scream. For an instant I thought Ann Woltor would faint, then quicker than chain lighting, right there before our eyes we saw her make her great decision. It was as though her brain was glass and we could see its every working.

"All right," said Ann Woltor, very quietly. "All right—you—Damn fool—I *will* tell you! I will tell everybody!"

For the first time in his life I saw Rollins stagger!

But Rollins could not remain prostrate even under such a rebuff as this.

"Why—er—thank you—thank you very much," he rallied with his first returning breath. "Shall I—shall I call the others?"

"By all means, call them quickly," said Ann Woltor.

"Oh, Ann!" I protested.

"I mean it," she said. Her face was strangely quiet. "The time has come—I've made up my mind at last."

From the door of the porch we heard Rollins's piping voice.

"Mr. Brenswick! Mr. Keets! Kennilworth! Allan John!—Come on! Miss Woltor's going to tell us a story!"

With vaguely responsive interest, the people came trooping in.

"A story?" brightened the Bride. "Oh, lovely—what is it about?"

"The story of my broken tooth," said Ann Woltor, very trenchantly, "told by request—Mr. Rollins's request," she added.

With a single comprehensive glance at my tortured face — at my Husband's — at Ann Woltor's, Claude Kennilworth turned sharply on his heel and started to leave the room.

"What, don't you want to hear the story?" piped Rollins.

"No, not by a damn sight," snapped Kennilworth.

"But I want you to hear it," said Ann Woltor, still in that deadly quiet but absolutely firm voice.

George Keets's lips were drawn suddenly to a mere thin white line.

"One has no desire to intrude, Miss Woltor," he protested.

"It is no intrusion," said Ann Woltor.

For a single hesitating moment her sombre eyes swept the waiting group. Then, without further break or pause, she plunged into her narrative.

"I am the May Girl's mother," she said. "I ran away from the May Girl's father. I ran away with another man. I don't pretend to explain it. I don't pretend to condone it. This is not a discussion of ethics—but a mere statement of history. All that I insist upon your understanding—is that I ran away from a legalized life of incessant fault-finding and criticism to an unlegalized life of absolute approval and love.

"I cannot even admit, after the first big wrench, of course, that I greatly regretted the little child I left behind. Mothers are always supposed to regret such things I know, but I was not perhaps a normal mother. I suffered, of course, but it was a suffering that I could stand. I could not stand, it seems, the suffering of living with my child's father.

"My husband followed us after a few months, not so much for outraged love, I think, as for vindictiveness. We met in a café, the three of us. My husband and my

lover were both cool-blooded men. My lover was a Quaker who had never yet lifted his hand against any man. The two men started arguing. I came of a hot-blooded family. I had never seen men arguing only—about a woman before. More than that I was vain. I was foolish. The biggest portrait painter of the hour had chosen me for what he considered would be his masterpiece. I taunted my lover and my husband with the fact that neither of them loved me. John Stoltor struck my husband. It was the first blow. My husband made a furious attack on him. I tried to intervene. He struck me instead, with such damage as you note. Enraged beyond all sanity at the sight, John Stoltor killed him.

"Even then, so overwrought as I was, so bewildered with my mouth all cut and bleeding, I snatched up a mirror to gauge the extent of my ruin. John Stoltor spoke to me—the only harsh words of his life.

"Your damage can be repaired in an hour," he said—"but his—mine—*never!*"

"It was at that moment they took him away—almost fifteen years—it has been. He did not have to pay the extreme penalty. There were extenuating circumstances the judge

thought. His time expires next month. I am waiting for him. I have been waiting for fifteen years. At least he will see that I have subjugated my vanity. I swore that I would never mend my damage until I could help him mend his."

With a little gesture of fatigue she turned to Rollins. "This is the story of the broken tooth," she finished, quite abruptly.

"Wasn't Allan John even listening?" I thought. With everyone else's eyes fairly glued to Ann Woltor's arresting face, even now, at the supreme climax of her narrative, his eyes seemed focussed far away. Instinctively I followed his gaze. At the top of the stairs, her arms holding tight to the banisters for support, sat the May Girl!

In the almost breathless moment that ensued, Rollins swallowed twice only too audibly.

"All the same"—insisted Rollins hesitatingly, "all the same—I really do think that——"

With a little cry that might have meant almost anything, the Bride jumped up suddenly and threw her arms around Ann Woltor's neck.

Even at twilight time everybody was still

discussing the problem of the May Girl. Certainly there was plenty of problem to discuss.

The question of an innocent young girl—on the very verge of her young womanhood. The question of a practically unknown mother. The question of a shattered unrelated man coming fresh to them from fifteen years in prison. The question even of Dr. Brawne. Everybody had his or her own impractical or unsatisfactory solution to suggest. Everybody, that is, except Allan John.

Allan John as usual had nothing to say.

Upstairs, in the privacy of her own room, Ann Woltor and the May Girl, without undue emotion, were very evidently threshing out the problem for themselves.

Yet when they came down and joined us just before supper-time, it was only too evident from their tired faces that they had reached no happier conclusion than ours.

George Keets and my Husband brought the May Girl down. Claude Kennilworth, quite in his old form, save for his splinted arm, superintended the expedition.

"It's her being so beastly long," scolded Kennilworth, "that makes the job so hard!"

In the depths of the big leather chair the May Girl didn't look very long to me, but she did look astonishingly frail.

With a gesture of despair, Ann Woltor turned to her companions, as if she had read our thoughts.

"There isn't any solution," she said.

Why all of us turned just then to Allan John I don't know, but it became perfectly evident to everyone at that moment that Allan John was about to speak.

"It seems quite clear to me," said Allan John simply. "It seems quite natural to me somehow," he added, "that you should all come home with me to my ranch in Montana. The little girl needs it—the big outdoors—the animals—the life she craves. You need it," he said, turning to Ann Woltor, "the peace of it, the balm of it. But most of all John Stoltor will need it when it is time for him to come. Far from prying eyes, safe from intrusive questionings, that certainly will be the perfect chance for you all to plan out your new lives together. How much it would mean to me not to have to go back alone I need not say."

Startled at his insight, compelled by his

sincerity, Ann Woltor saw order dawn suddenly out of the chaos of her emotions.

From her frankly quivering lips a single protest wavered.

"But Allan John," she cried, "you've only known us four days."

Across Allan John's haggard face flickered the faintest possible suggestion of a smile.

"I was a stranger—and you took me in."

With the weirdest possible sense of supernatural benediction, the dark room flooded suddenly with light. From the window, just beyond me, I heard my Husband's astonished exclamation:

"Look, Mary," he cried, "come quickly."

At an instant I was at his side.

Across the murky western sky the tumultuous storm-clouds had broken suddenly into silver and gold. In a blaze of glory the setting sun fairly streamed into our faces.

Struggling up from the depths of her chair to view it—even the May Girl's pallid cheeks caught up their share of the radiance.

"Oh, Allan John," she laughed, "just see what you have done—you've shined up all the world."

With a curiously significant expression on his face my Husband leaned toward me quickly.

"Ring down the curtain, quick," he whispered. "The Play's done—*Rainy Week* is over."

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